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ELECTION '97: no one's pulling our strings

THE INDEPENDENT

Nº 8,218

WEDNESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 1997

WEATHER: Dull and drizzly at first

(IR45p) 40p

THE TABLOID

MARRIAGE

No thanks,
says Virginia Ironside

Yes please,
says
Bridget Jones

NEWS

The family who
murdered their
mother PAGE 3

It's going to be May Day, senior Tories confirm

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Senior Conservatives said last night that if John Major had not called a general election by next Wednesday, he would hold fire for his favoured date of 1 May.

Options are being closed by the strict timetables that apply to election dates, and an announcement has to be made next week if he is to call an election on 20 March.

It emerged at Westminster yesterday that a 20 March poll is the only way in which Mr Major can be certain of averting the Writal South by-election, in which the Conservatives are facing humiliating defeat.

A 20 March poll would mean the dissolution of Parliament a week on Monday. But it would snack of panic if Mr Major did not give at least two or three working days' notice of his intentions - to give time for Parliament to tidy up and clear the legislative programme.

In 1992, Parliament was dissolved on 16 March, but the election announcement was made by Mr Major on 11 March. In 1987, the announcement was made on 11 May, with Parliament dissolved on 18 May. Parliament would have to be dissolved for a 20 March election on 24 February - which suggests an announcement by next Wednesday at the latest.

Speculation that the Prime Minister might hope to kill the by-election by calling an election for the next-favoured option, 10 April, is ruled out by the fact that Parliament would not be dissolved until 12 March - giving the new Writal South MP plenty of time to take his seat.

Some ministers and MPs have argued that if Mr Major announced his intention to call an April election on 24 February - three days before the by-election - that would be enough to get the by-election called off. But that decision would be in the hands of Phil Mansel, Writal South's acting returning officer, and all the indications yesterday were that Mr Mansel would feel obliged to continue with the by-election.

Although the definitive election guide, Parker's Conduct of Elections, makes no reference to the problem, guidance issued by the Commons library says: "If Parliament were still in existence on [the by-election] polling day, the acting returning officer might well consider he had no authority to cancel the election."

Bad results to cost jobs of teachers

Judith Judd
Education Editor

Teachers whose pupils fail to match up to national standards may be sacked under new government measures designed to increase parent power announced yesterday by the Prime Minister.

Schools will have to report to parents on whether they are meeting national targets and there will be more league tables, Mr Major said as the pre-election battle over education intensified.

Both the main parties claimed that the other was stealing their ideas on how to raise standards. Labour said John Major had done a U-turn on target-setting which it had backed for several years. The Prime Minister accused Labour of playing "catch-up" politics.

Ministerial announcements came tumbling out of Whitehall and Westminster. A press briefing by Gillian Shephard, the Secretary of State for Education, on the strengthening of A-levels, was overshadowed by another at Conservative Central Office where the Prime Minister, backed by Mrs Shephard, disclosed the new league table plans.

Teacher unions described the decision to appraise teachers partly by their pupils' test and exam results as "the policy of the madhouse". Heads said more league tables would be strenuously opposed by the entire profession.

New school reports will have to include schools' own targets, the local authority's target, the national target, and the achievement of similar types of schools. Mr Major said. Hll squads will be sent into failing local authorities.

Performance tables for National Curriculum tests will be published for pupils aged seven and 14 as well as for GCSE and A-level pupils as at present. The first tables for 11-year-olds will be published next month.

Mr Major said: "The next stage of our parent power reforms will ensure once and for all that parents are the masters of their children's schooling."

David Blunkett, shadow Secretary of State for Education, said: "Two weeks ago, Labour proposed a new national literacy target as an addition to the Edu-

cation Bill. Education Minister Eric Forth refused to accept the clause. Now, two weeks later, we have another U-turn from ministers as they accept yet another Labour proposal to raise standards." Only a week ago, he added, Labour had announced its plans to improve poor local education authorities.

On league tables, he explained that Labour would continue to publish national tables of GCSE and A-level results but would require results for seven and 14-year-olds to be published only by local authorities. The party would decide later what to do about tables for 11-year-olds.

Mr Major ridiculed the idea that Labour was the party of higher standards. "We should judge Labour by their actions, not their words, by their opposition to our reforms and by the fact that the 20 worst performing education authorities have all been under long-term Labour control," he said.

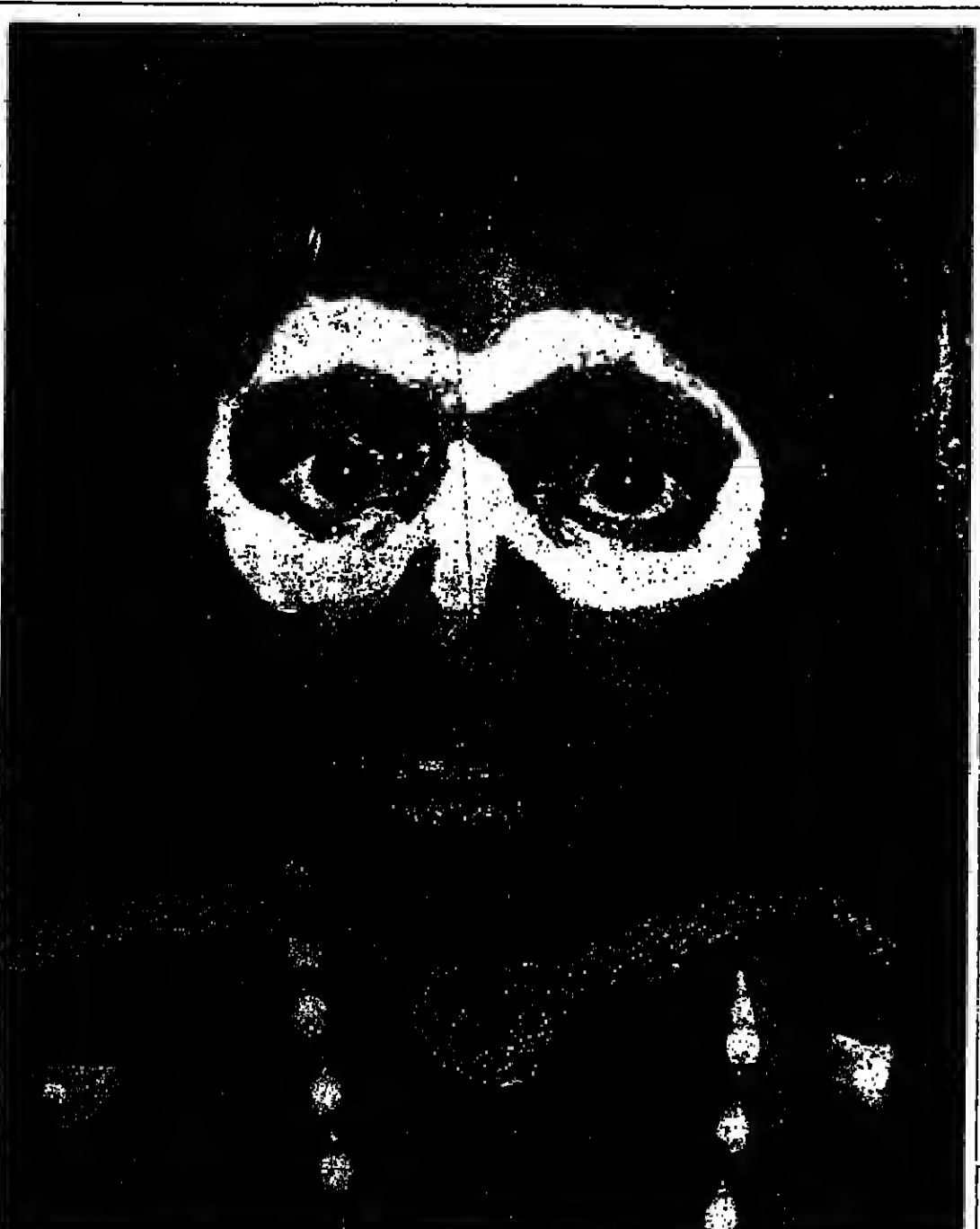
Mrs Shephard promised tough action against under-performing teachers. She said: "We shall now be introducing a rigorous appraisal scheme for teachers, judging them on their pupils' performance. Where necessary we will be removing teachers who cannot reach the required national standards."

New criteria to judge teachers were being drawn up including classroom control, organisation, lesson planning, ability to convey enthusiasm for the subject and pupils' performance.

Nigel de Gruchy, general secretary of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers, said: "On the face of it, years of development of teacher appraisal are to be swept aside in the interests of a few seconds of prime-ministerial soundbite in the Conservative Party's increasingly desperate attempts to catch the big idea on education."

But David Hart, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "Of course teachers must be appraised on their performance, including the results of their pupils. What is wholly unacceptable is for the Secretary of State to imply that there is some easy route for removing incompetent teachers."

Leading article, page 11



In the picture: A Papuan boy, photographed by Austin Mitchell, Labour MP for Great Grimsby, and on show until Friday in the Tenth Annual Photographic Exhibition by the Parliamentary Photographic Group in the Upper Waiting Hall of the House of Commons. Another of the exhibitors, Lord Healey, passing it, remarked that it reminded him strongly of certain young Conservative candidates in the forthcoming election.

Dorrell humiliated

John Major issued a humiliating rebuke to his Health Secretary, Stephen Dorrell, over Mr Dorrell's claim that a future Conservative government would abolish a Scottish parliament.

Page 5

Russia's nuclear threat

Russia yesterday threatened that it might use nuclear weapons pre-emptively in future conflicts. In response to a conventional attack. The move was designed to put increased pressure on Nato.

Page 8

QUICKLY

British Oscar hopes

The English Patient and Secrets and Lies topped the British nominations for Oscars.

Page 2

Vlora and continues

Furious citizens of the Albanian city of Vlora yesterday set fire to the headquarters of the ruling Democratic Party and changed slogans accusing the government of murder as they joined the funeral of a man who was shot

dead during the riots earlier in the week.

Page 8

Spendthrift puritans

Britons are becoming a nation of spendthrift puritans, shying away from conspicuous consumerism, but indulging in regular treats which end up costing more.

Page 6

Bath sacks Hall

John Hall, Bath Rugby Club's champion team manager and former world-class flanker, was sacked from his £60,000 job.

Page 24

Witch spells trouble for council chiefs

Steve Boggan

The cats were safely locked away but the broomstick was there as the men from the council arrived for their meeting with Kevin the Witch.

He had his priestess, Sandie, a financial adviser from Barclays Bank, were in their robes but they did their best to give Southwark council's head of parks a warm welcome.

"I see you, didn't come alone," Kevin said to Colin Brand. "Afraid I'd sacrifice you?"

Mr Brand and his assistant, Robin Hayworth, were the unluckiest council officials in Britain yesterday. It was their task to travel to Hastings in East

Sussex to try to talk Kevin Carlyon, High Priest of British Witches, out of casting a spell on a controversial council scheme to move a south London children's playground to a new site in the borough.

A number of residents, who suspected the council was planning to sell the site to developers, called in Mr Carlyon to stymie the scheme - a threat the Labour-controlled council was taking seriously.

"You see, the council's concerned because the Bishop of Greenwich is getting involved now," said Mr Brand, sitting uncomfortably on Kevin's sofa.

"Some parents are worried. And there are rumours that you're going to cast spells that



Spellbound: Kevin the Witch (right) with Colin Brand (centre) and Robin Hayworth yesterday. Photograph: Peter Macdonald

could hurt the children. The Bishop says that if you go along to cast your spell, then he'll have to go along and do his thing to exorcise it."

Woolwich, the Right Rev Colin Buchanan, and the Bishop of Southwark, the Right Rev Roy Williamson, denied that they were planning a Denis Wheatley-style confrontation.

However, the Rev Michael Counsell, vicar of St Augustine's church in Honour Oak, nearest to the proposed new playground, said he had planned to invoke Christian goodness to counteract Kevin's pagan spell - a spell that would involve only wishing local residents success in their campaigning.

"I had planned to say prayers in the church at the same time as he was casting his spell," said Mr Counsell.

But that won't now be necessary. After an hour spent pa-

tefully explaining about the new, state-of-the-art playground, with Tarzan swings and a rubber surface on which children will bounce, Mr Brand, a cool man in a crisis, convinced Kevin the Witch that the spell would not be necessary.

"It sounds like a smashing new playground," said Kevin. "In fact, we've decided to cast a new spell instead, wishing the project, and all who use it, great fun and success."

It was clear yesterday that the Church of England wasn't too keen on witches' spells, so what about the new one?

"Well," said Mr Counsell, "if that's what he's going to do, we'd welcome him with open arms."

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The family who killed their mother

Jonathan Foster

Eve Howells demanded regular massages from Glenn, her teenage son, sitting naked in the bedroom as the boy squirmed, averting his eyes from her "private parts". She made both her sons clean the dirt from her toenails, spat abuse at them, beat them, and tied them to the kitchen table. She threatened to burn their teddy bears.

She blamed Glenn for the death of her first-born, and sat naked on the toilet when he showered. She abused him "on a global scale", a clinical psychologist told Leeds Crown Court. Glenn was 15 when he smashed his mother's skull with the sharp and blunt ends of the hammer. Something had gone in his head, he told the court. Blood hit the ceiling, and then Glenn felt her pulse. "I wanted my mum back," he said. She used to call him "a fat fucker".

Yesterday Mrs Howells' husband, David, and two teenage sons, Glenn, now 17 and John, now 16, were convicted of her murder by a jury. Mrs Howells, 48, died as the culmination of a plot hatched by the three to rid them of the source of persistent sexual, physical and emotional abuse. The judge, Mr Justice Alistair, will today pass sentences of life imprisonment on Mr Howells and indefinite detention on Glenn and John. But he said he wanted to give lawyers additional time to prepare addresses which may influence his



Hell on earth: Glenn (left) who struck the fatal blows with a hammer, Mrs Howells (centre) with the boys as toddlers and John (right)



Photographs: Ross Parry

recommendations for minimum periods of detention. "Although I entirely endorse the verdicts, I don't know the whole truth," the judge said.

The boys and their father planned various plots before Glenn was inspired by the *Crimewatch* programme to take a hammer to his mother at their Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, home in August 1995. The boys were to "discover" her killed

during a burglary while their father was safe in the alibi of a pub darts match. But forensic evidence and police suspicions, aroused by the trio's absence of grief, led to the prosecutions.

It was almost a paradoxical killing, the violent member of "the family from hell" in the morgue, her victims in the dock. Mrs Howells taught at a Huddersfield secondary school. She terrified pupils, according

to a colleague. She was "very, very disturbed", she said. She was "Belsen thin. She said she had cancer, but there was little wrong with her body. She had a string of psychosomatic disorders, her doctor said. He put her on Valium and sleeping tablets."

She "swiped" an inheritance bequeathed to her father, and amassed a £155,000 personal fortune. Her salary was saved

and household expenses met from her husband's wages. David Howells drank too much: he was cuckolded by his best friend, frightened of his wife, and too weak in head the boys' advice to get divorced.

They lived at "Garth Edge", a bungalow with ivy around the replacement windows. It stands on a middle-class street protected by privet and sleeping policemen, but Mrs Howells was

far from suburban discreet. One neighbour abandoned sitting in his garden because of her cursing, another remembered bath-time for the children. "The screams that used to come out were like someone was murdering them", the court heard. "It was almost as though she was drowning them."

John was his mother's favourite. He was not spared abuse, but enjoyed privileges,

sweets when he did the pedicure and a proper tea when she made Glenn dinner with bread and jam. John was "overly compliant", social workers said. John said: "She was always a bitch... she treated us like dirt."

At the age of 5, John would open as many as 18 tins of food when he came home from school, take a spoonful from each, then conceal them. He would urinate in the litter bin,

bite around the edge of his bed, and break toys. A psychiatrist said he was young in being acting like that, and was probably rebelling against her discipline.

Three days after they escaped her discipline by murder, the boys went into town to celebrate their liberation. They had their ears pierced.

Jurors heard conversations between the three, "bugged" at a police station on the authority of an assistant chief constable. Forensic evidence had put the boys by their mother when the blood flew. David Howells had behaved suspiciously, any feelings of bereavement subordinated to a thirst for revenge.

He told the boys to stick to the story, bluff it out. "If you two break, then I'm in as well."

But the enduring impression of the tapes was Glenn's misery. "Gut no dad any more... got no mum and dad... want me mum," he sobbed.

The boys made confessions but told different stories. David Howells stuck to his: he found out what the boys had done, never condoned it, but tried to contrive a plausible cover-up.

John said his father joined the plotting "a little bit". John's admissions consisted of "wicked lies", his father said. Glenn said his father knew nothing.

Under cross-examination, Glenn was asked: "Would you have killed your mother without the approval of your father, depriving him of a wife?" "She deprived me of my life," Glenn said.

British Rail: The end.

(Farewell to age of steam and curly sandwiches)

Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

The journey is over for British Rail. The end of the line came yesterday after the Government announced that the last trainset in public hands was to be given to coach and rail giant National Express.

The sale of Regional Railways Central - whose network stretches from Wales to Norwich - will put the nation's vast passenger rail network in private hands.

British Rail was nationalised in 1948 by the Atlee government. But its card was marked in the 1960s by Dr Richard Beeching, BR's chairman, who considered it a business not a social service. Since then poor investment - by both Labour and Tory governments - saw the once-proud network become the butt of commuter jokes.

British Rail's ride to the stock market was remarkably quick. Agreements on the preferred bidders have been completed in just over a year. The new owners of the last seven franchises were revealed in just over a fortnight. The impending election quickened the pace.

The sale of the Central franchise to National Express, makes the bus group the largest operators of trains in Britain. Privatisation will see Scottish trains run by National Express, an English coach company, and the largest chunk of British Rail in the hands of a French company, Connex.

"Franchising has turned the unified national railway network into a disorganised patchwork of competing companies. This will see network benefits like connecting services fade away replaced by cost cutting and poor service quality," said



National pride: The railways' heydays inspired great engineering feats - such as the Forth Bridge, shown in the BR poster by Terence Cuneo. Science Museum Poster Collection

Jonathan Bray, campaigner with Save Our Railways, a group set up to halt the sell-off. For some observers, however, the railways should never have left private hands. They point out that entrepreneurs gave birth to the Victorian rail renaissance. The first railway open to the general public start-

ed in 1825 when George Stephenson's steam locomotive graced The Stockton & Darlington railway line.

The Victorian railways were the engine of progress in 1800s. But the past has lessons for today's new owners. As competition intensified between private firms, many went bust.

The rise of the railways was cut short by the motor car in the 1920s. This saw the plethora of smaller companies bought up by larger rail firms. In 1923, only four companies were left - Southern, London North Eastern, Great Western and London, Midland, Scottish.

Critics argue that the present

structure has created a new series of rail barons prepared to cut services should passengers desert the railways. Virgin's Richard Branson owns most of the InterCity services, including the 700 miles of West Coast mainline. Anti-privatisation campaigners say that Stagecoach, a bus firm which won one

of the largest rail franchises, has provided a "poor" service. Its company, South West Trains, was forced to cancel hundreds of trains this week.

However, this pales into insignificance when one remembers George Hudson - the last "railway king". In 1844, he controlled more than 1,000 miles of

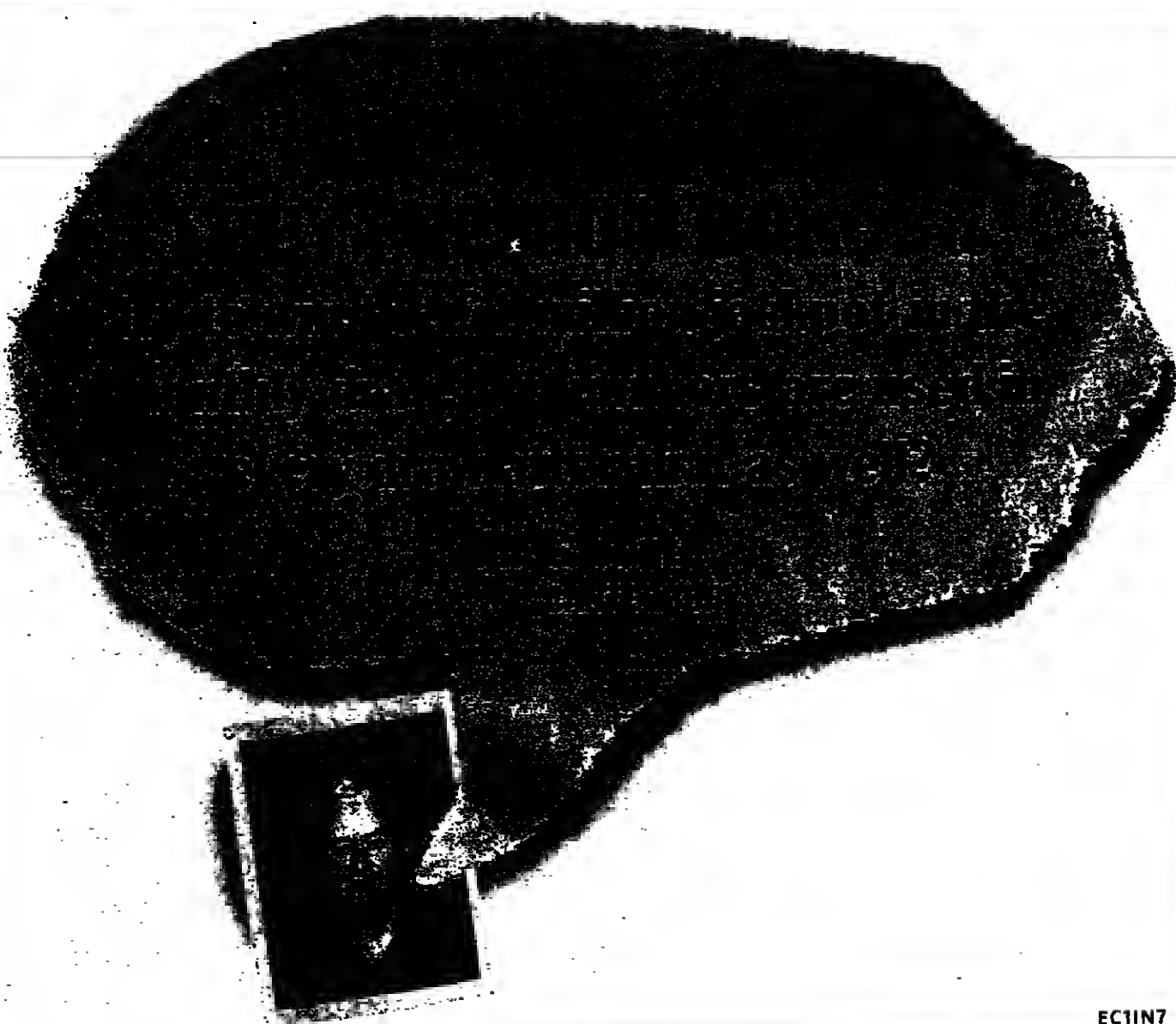
railway. His fall was rapid after investors found he had paid more than £290,000 in share dividends in line his own pockets.

Despite its fall, British Rail is still the last laugh. It can only be finally killed by an Act of Parliament - an unlikely event before the election.

South West fined, page 16

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It is small wonder that the Prime Minister runs so far ahead of his party in popular estimation. With a few notable exceptions, he is not only seems nicer than most of his colleagues, but funnier too. There is a part of John Major's psyche that slips run-punches in calm, warm lands - whereas his desperate, fractious friends live year round in a region of cold winds and barren hills, where dog eats dog.

The cuss were certainly running during defence question-time. That keen-mouthed whipper, Nigel Evans (Con, Ribbles Valley) told the House that his part of Lancashire (which is down to make the fins, or the belly, of the Eurofighter) had not forgotten the cancellation of the TSR2 by Harold Wilson, which had "cost hundreds of

thousands of jobs in the Preston area". So was not Labour's proposed defence review a pile of old knob? Having delivered himself of this abuse of question-time, a silly exaggeration and piece of chronic wish-fulfilment all at the same time, Mr Evans subsided with an artful imitation of genuine anger on his pinched features.

All who were involved - or listening - were exhausted by this kind of idiosyncrasy the time we got to Prime Minister's questions. Those who believe (like Douglas Hurd) that all is basically well at Parliament, should examine a copy of yesterday's Hansard and see for themselves with what contempt the concept of ministerial accountability is treated by the ruling party.

PM's Qs, of course, has long since

DAVID Aaronovitch

House game of baiting the Beast for telling the truth

ceased to have any function other than being a piece of partisan theatre. Only the most unyieldable or belligerent backbenchers ask any question other than the one that the whips have written out for them. And usually these are either Labour quips aiming to expose

dither, or Tory plants trying to suggest danger.

But someone in the PM's office had been doing their homework. The under-secretary with responsibility for sending out cards on the occasion of birthdays had noticed that yesterday was the 65th

anniversary of the birth of the Beast of Bolsover, Dennis Skinner. Clever chaps at No 10 sat around and wrote out a little question for one of the reliable backbenchers to ask, and an amusing series of responses for the PM to come back with.

So, the Blair-Major ritual being done, Tim Devlin (Stockport S) arose to ask the PM to reflect upon the acquisition of pensioner status by the honourable member. The House roared, some sang Happy Birthday Dear Be-ast, Mr Major delivered his lines well and warmly.

But what of Dennis? He scowled furiously and refused to smile. Perhaps he knows that little is more nauseating than his adoption as tame ranting revolutionary by an utterly unfrightened House. Or maybe he is just vain enough not to want his advanced age discussed

publicly. But the more he scowled, the funnier everyone thought it all was. "I hope he smiles before he's 66", Major joked, with spot-on comic timing.

Flourishing convention, Speaker Betty Boothroyd called an anger-raddled Skinner to reply. And Dennis, gurning like an attenuated Les Dawson - celebrated his 65th in the same way he probably marked his 5th - with a disconnected rant about the appalling Tories and their leader who had "come from the belly of the banking establishment", given us Black Wednesday and doubled the national debt.

Oh, how we all laughed! For though every word that Skinner said was true, we all knew there was sod-all that anybody (apart from the nice Mr Major) could do about it.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

John Major 3/10
Major pointed out Blair's irritating habit of using pre-prepared soundbites. Unfortunately he went on to drop a flimsy anecdote about his school days using the NHS as a political "footnote". Beyond the exchanges with Blair, however, he performed well.

Tony Blair 3/10
Blair pointed out Major's irritating habit of playing a question with another question. However, if any question can be guaranteed to speed a round of non-answers and stalling, this is it. Question Time, it is one about the NHS, which he clearly asked.

THEME OF THE DAY
The effects of chemical weapons testing in England (Glen Livingstone, Lab, Essex East)

The importance of the defence industry for jobs, Phil Goffe (Con, Agt)

Pensioners' incomes and Dennis Skinner's 65th birthday (Tim Devlin, Con, Stockport South)

Michael Portillo and the Royal Yacht (Alan Davies, Lab, Merseyside South)

BLAIR'S ATTACK
Blair asked whether Health Secretary Stephen Dorrell should not be concentrating on the "rags and ragwort" crisis in the NHS, rather than devolution. Major replied that Robin Cook, when shadowing Health Secretary, had at one point departed from the Labour line on devolution.

GOOD DAY
John Major improved later, teasing Skinner: "He's going to say he's 65, and I'm kidding the figures." Skinner was the only one not to laugh. "I hope he smiles before he's 66," Major added.

THE Q&A OF THE DAY
With reference to the Royal Yacht, Stephen pointed out that Sir Edward Heath had described the yacht as "a real gem". He asked the Prime Minister to admit that yet again he has been misled by his own Party.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION
Livingstone asked whether Major had seen the letter he received from the Defence Secretary, admitting there had been "biological warfare experiments conducted on the civilian populations in London and along the South Coast", and whether Major set up an independent inquiry. Major said he had not seen the letter.

THE Q&A OF THE DAY
John Whitehouse (Con, South Cheshire and Macclesfield) asked Major to confirm that he did not intend to abolish grammar schools. It is possible, he then asked Major, at what time challenging questions in government are only there to trip up Labour in local elections?

Dorrell rebuked by Major in devolution row

Fran Abrams and Colin Brown

John Major yesterday issued a humiliating rebuke to his Secretary of State for Health after a series of cabinet spills over the issue of Scottish devolution.

In a move that will be widely interpreted as the latest skirmish in the Conservative Party leadership battle, the Prime Minister publicly sacked Stephen Dorrell from an extra role on the constitution.

The Prime Minister used a press conference on education to claim that Mr Dorrell had never even held the campaigning post at all.

The Health Secretary had told a newspaper that a future Tory government would abolish a Scottish parliament set up by Labour - a claim which was then refuted by the Scottish Secretary, Michael Forsyth.

Mr Major said yesterday that it was he, and not Mr Dorrell, who was in overall charge of policy on devolution.

"Responsibility for the constitution rests with the Prime Minister and the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Wales," he said. "That has always been the case and it remains the case."

"As Michael Forsyth has said for a long time, if you have an omelette like that, it isn't an

omelette that can be readily unscrambled."

It is not the first time that Mr Dorrell has been accused of straying from his brief in the interests of pursuing his leadership ambitions.

In January, he caused a similar furor when he suggested that Britain's relationship with the European Union should be renegotiated.

Mr Dorrell privately sought to limit the damage, which could dent his long-term ambitions for the Tory leadership, telling friends that he would still speak on constitutional issues.

He faced further embarrassment later in the House of Commons, when he announced a retreat on the NHS Primary Care Bill.

Labour's health spokesman, Chris Smith, accused him of "backtracking" twice in two days. "It is the Secretary of State's week for backtracking," he said. "He spent most of yesterday trying unsuccessfully to extricate himself from the hole that he has injudiciously planted himself in with Scottish devolution. Now he has climbed down over a central feature of the Bill."

Mr Dorrell announced, as *The Independent* reported yesterday, that he would table an amendment to the Bill to prevent private companies such as

supermarkets hiring family doctors to open surgeries.

Yesterday's manoeuvrings indicated a new intensity of election campaigning. Two new planned policy changes suggested that the Government was anxious not to let Labour gain the initiative.

In Parliament, Mr Major indicated that he was prepared to look at the possibility of making Holocaust denial illegal, and revealed that he was planning a meeting with the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

Michael Howard, the Home Secretary, followed Labour proposals to force disclosure of sex offences to schools and other agencies with his own proposals to let residents know when a sex offender moves into their neighbourhood.

Last night, Labour's head of election strategy, Peter Mandelson, accused the Conservatives of "jackdaw tendencies". Several Labour initiatives on education had been copied, he said, along with a commitment to flexible pensions, plans to help lone parents back to work and proposals to outlaw stalking.

"Bereft of their own ideas and out of touch with the public's mood, the Tories have decided to launch a wholesale raid on new Labour's policies," he said.



Trade talk: President Alberto Fujimori of Peru visiting Baroness Thatcher's Belgravia offices yesterday while in London for the Latin America trade forum. Photograph: John

Clouds still hover over the Conservatives in Wirral

Fears about the state of the NHS and education are persuading Tories to switch to Labour

Michael Streeter

Labour are on course for a spectacular by-election victory in Wirral South as canvassing yesterday showed that the early trend of disgruntled Conservative voters switching to Labour seems to be continuing.

At the centre of this swing is the barometer ward of Bebington, a mixed residential and industrial area in the north of the constituency. It was once a safe Tory area but in the last three years Labour has won three council seats in local elections and Bebington is now an important battleground for the two main parties. Many people in the area are what politicians call the "aspirant" classes: people who have moved from Liverpool or Ellesmere Port for a better standard of living, schools and housing.



Social harmony: Workers and residents together in a memorial to William Lever, the philanthropist founder of Port Sunlight in the Wirral South seat. Photograph: David Rose

Yesterday under a grey cloudy sky the mood in Village Road, Bebington, reflected dismal prospects for the Conservatives and their 8,183 majority. Claire Francis, 24, a tour operator, voted Conservative in 1992 but will now vote for Labour's candidate Beo Chapman. Her reasons echo the views of many people interviewed by *The Independent*.

"It's all about the state of the health service. From what I have seen it's time for a change," he said.

She believes that Tony Blair is charismatic, thinks John Major has lost the plot and while accepting that many people, including herself, are fed-up with politicians, she says a new government is essential. "Otherwise I will be in despair," she said.

This desire for change is not confined to the young. A retired newscaster George Thompson, 67, has always voted Conservative - until now. He cites pay in the NHS and education but is also tired of the "sleaze" surrounding the government and its attitude of "giving jobs for the

boys". His fears about what a Labour government might do in power have been allayed by the party's reforms. "Tony Blair is much more in the middle now, but I would not have voted for Neil Kinnock."

Mr Thompson's disenchantment reflects the findings of an opinion poll at the weekend which suggested that Labour could win a comfortable majority on 27 February. But as the poll also hinted he is not so sure who to vote for in the general election - though he will probably still opt for Labour.

Many Tories have still to make up their mind. Brian Sumner, 49, a clerk, is concerned about the NHS, and also law and order. "The health service seems to be deteriorating and it appears more dangerous as far as policing is concerned. I fear that the fabric of society is beginning to crumble at the edges," he says.

But as a new homeowner, Mr Sumner is unsure what a change of government might bring. "Is the cost of living going to rise under a Labour government? Will interest rates go up? I just don't know who to believe."

The Conservatives have fought the campaign by trying to localise national issues and

in particular have hammered aggressively on the likely fate of grammar schools in the constituency under a Labour government. Helen Owen, 35, a Labour voter, said grammar schools were the first issue raised at her door by a Tory canvasser, who said the schools' fate would be uncertain under a Blair administration. "Doesn't that worry you?" he asked her. After a brief conversation the canvasser left telling her: "You should stay indoors more and watch more TV."

Mrs Owen said: "I was quite surprised by the attitude. He was quite rude."

Though the strategy has provoked a further "clarification" of Labour's stance on selective schools and despite claims by the Conservative candidate Les Byrom that the message is getting through, *The Independent* found little evidence that the grammar school debate is influencing votes - though many voters were worried about the general standard of education.

One Tory supporter who asked not to be named said it would not decide her vote. "What worries me is John Major. He is just a puppet."

Roy Clarke, 51, an engineer, once voted Conservative but

now feels they have gone too far over privatisation and sees Labour as a party of moderation and Conservative values - with a small c. "The unions needed taming but the Tories are now out of touch. They call themselves Conservatives but they are the radicals."

There is a feeling among Labour voters that the tide is turning their way and claim that friends and family are helping switch votes. Andrew McGuffie, 52, an insurance agent, said: "My father-in-law has always voted Conservative. He is now talking about voting Labour."

Yet many Conservatives are finding it hard to contemplate changing sides despite their anger at the party. Ivor and Helen Pierce said they would "grudgingly" vote for John Major again even though they did not much like him. They said they did not trust Tony Blair.

Such die-hard sentiments are the reason why Labour activists caution against too much optimism in a seat which does not feature in their list of "must-win" target constituencies for the general election. But in their more sanguine moments they are hoping that the voters of Bebington might just swing it for them.

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A-levels remain on the gold standard

Broader and better exam as sixth-form study is diversified

Judith Judd and Lucy Ward

Sixth-formers will be able to study for broader and better A-levels from next year, but this year's 18-year-olds can be confident that the standard of their exams is as high as ever.

Gillian Shepherd, the Secretary of State for Education, yesterday announced measures to strengthen the GCSE A-level exam as inspectors reported that its standard has stood the test of time.

From next year, the AS-level exam syllabus, pitched half way between GCSE and A-level, will be revamped to encourage pupils to study more subjects in the sixth form. Consultation will begin on a new AS-level in communication, numeracy and information technology.

There will also be a voluntary National Advanced Diploma involving at least four different areas of study, including either maths or science. Students who wish to acquire the diploma will have to demonstrate their knowledge of core skills.

A-level syllabuses will change to make them more rigorous, Mrs Shepherd said. There will be more British history, more emphasis on pre-1900 English literature and on knowledge of grammar and syntax in modern languages. English language exams will also concentrate more on grammar and all candidates will have to take a calculator-free paper in maths.

The number of exam boards will be reduced, probably to three, which will offer both academic and vocational qualifications.

Mrs Shepherd said key skills "were an essential element of guaranteeing standards. Employers want the qualifications system to be simplified, comprehensible and to include key skills, as a measure of employability," she said.

A report by the schools inspection watchdog Ofsted gave a generally clean bill of health to A-levels, countering traditionalists' allegations of decline

for the second time in two months.

Despite claims that the A-level gold standard has been debased by "grade inflation", the study found standards were consistent over time and between exam boards. It said syllabuses were generally well organised, procedures were thorough and assessment was reliable.

The report came just two months after a joint report from Ofsted and the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority found no evidence of any overall fall in standards over the past 22 years. The study published yesterday looked at the standards and quality of A-levels and AS-levels in seven subjects, based on a two-year inspection in England and Wales.

Inspectors analysed syllabuses, exam papers and marking schemes and scrutinised more than 2,000 scripts for 1994-6 and found a "high level of consistency" over the three years.

They also found that a new code of practice introduced in 1993 had brought exam boards more closely into line.

However, the report calls for more formal measures to be put in place to ensure standards stay steady. It recommends more systematic procedures to make sure A-levels on the same subject from different boards are comparable and to guarantee standards over long periods.

The inspectors found modular syllabuses, which put less emphasis on one final exam, had boosted the enthusiasm of students. However, they warned exam boards to take care not to let modular exams get in the way of other A-level courses or schools' general operation. The inspectors' report acknowledged the difficulty of setting standards in A-levels - the thorny problem which underlies the grade inflation debate.

The report says the process is "complex and difficult" and "depends to a large extent on professional judgement - it can never be completely precise".

AT 4/5 YEARS OLD

NOW: Around half of primary schools already assess children on entry at four or five to check their abilities in the three Rs and identify any special educational needs.

FUTURE: From September next year, the system will be formalised, with all schools expected to assess children according to nationally-set criteria within their first term. These "baseline tests", being piloted from this September, will include numbers, reading and writing, as well as abilities such as concentration and practical skills such as washing hands and tying shoelaces. Schools will set the findings against results of tests at seven to measure their success in educating children.

AT 11 YEARS OLD

NOW: All state primary or middle schools are required to test children at 11. The key stage 2 tests, which are standard across the country, cover English, maths and science, and are supported by teacher assessments in all three subjects. By 11, pupils are expected to have reached level 4 on an eight-point scale used to measure

National Curriculum standards. FUTURE: The results of tests for 11-year-olds, introduced in 1995, will be published school-by-school in league-table form for the first time next month. The tables will cover tests sat last May in 16,000 primary schools in England.

AT 14 YEARS OLD

NOW: State secondary schools must test pupils at 14 at the end of key stage 3 of the National Curriculum. The tests, introduced in 1993, cover English, maths and science.

By age 14, pupils are expected to have reached level 5-6 on a scale of eight used to measure national curriculum standards, though by this age they may have moved to the top of the scale if exceptionally able. The results of tests for 14-year-olds are currently published only in terms of overall national performance.

FUTURE: Reports on overall national results will be supplemented with annual league tables showing individual school's results.

AT 7 YEARS OLD

NOW: All state primary schools are required by law to test children at seven - the end of the first "key stage" of the National Curriculum. The nationally-set tests, introduced in 1991, cover English and maths. They are designed to sum up what pupils have achieved over a defined range of each subject by the end of a set period at school.

The tests are backed up by teacher assessment in English, maths and science, which takes account of other evidence of achievement. By age seven,

pupils are expected to have reached level two on a scale of eight used to measure National Curriculum standards. FUTURE: Reports on overall national results will be supplemented with annual league tables showing individual school's results.

AT 16 YEARS OLD

NOW: State and independent secondary schools must publish the exam results of pupils aged 15-16 for inclusion in national league tables. The tables, introduced five years ago and published annually in November, show the percentage of eligible pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C (the score taken as the benchmark measure in order to rank schools); the percentage gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-G; and the percentage gaining one or more GCSEs at grades A*-G. Vocational qualifications, mainly intermediate level General National Vocational Qualifications, are also included, together with truancy levels.

FUTURE: No change under the Conservatives. Labour would include more information showing "value added" by schools.

17/18 YEARS OLD

NOW: State and independent secondary schools with sixth-forms must publish A-level results, together with results of AS-levels and vocational qualifications, for inclusion in national league tables. The tables show how many pupils in each school were entered for fewer than two A-levels or AS-levels and the results they achieved, and the numbers and scores of pupils taking two or more exams.

FUTURE: The present AS-level exam, which covers half the content of A-levels but to the same level of difficulty, is to be replaced by a new exam equating to the first half of an A-level course. It will be sat mainly by pupils aged 16 to 17, at the end of their first sixth-form year.



Low standards at £2,600-a-term school for children of the forces

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

An independent boarding school widely used by the children of forces personnel yesterday said it was a "serious weakness" and is breaching the law on health and safety, government inspectors said yesterday.

A report on £2,600-a-term Quenby School, near Bridgwater, in Somerset, uncovered bad management, sub-standard teaching, poor assessment of pupils and low exam results.

It also found that the 82-pupil school failed to meet the legal minimum requirements on

health and safety and pupil welfare. Staff were inadequately trained in child protection procedures and some pupils did not know there was an "independent listener" not employed by the school to whom they could turn with concerns.

Much of the school was very cold and some areas were unsafe, including workshops and a chemistry preparation room with broken glass on the floor and unlabelled chemicals.

The report, by the government schools inspection watchdog Ofsted, will renew concerns over public money being spent on the education of children of service personnel in a largely

unsuspected independent sector. In 1994-95, the Government spent £107m on school fee allowances for service personnel serving abroad. The Ministry of Defence provides a boarding school allowance of up to £2,248 per term for secondary-age pupils, though parents must contribute at least 10 per cent of the fees.

The MoD provides parents with a list of schools supplied by the Department for Education and Employment, but does not check or approve them. The education department is not obliged to inspect independent schools and has wound down its programme from 19 inspections in 1993-94 to three this year. It has written to the school expressing concern at the report and asking for its plans for remedial action.

The inspection report identified some strengths, including generally positive attitudes to work among pupils and a "superficially broad" curriculum. But it called for a wide range of urgent improvements, including more supervision of pupils, measures to make workshops and other areas safe, more teacher training and better planning and target-setting.

No one was available for comment at Quenby School yesterday.

Wall of silence from white youths at Lawrence inquest

The inquest into the death of the murdered black teenager Stephen Lawrence degenerated into a "mockery" of the legal system yesterday when five young white men refused to answer any questions relating to his death.

The "wall of silence" surrounding the killing of the promising A-level student - stabbed in an apparently racist attack as he waited for a bus in Eltham, south-east London, in April 1993 - was maintained as the five men repeatedly claimed the common law right of privilege against self-incrimination at the hearing at Southwark coroner's court, south London. The five were Neil Acourt, 21, Luke Knight, 19, and Gary Dobson, 21, who were all formally acquitted on a charge of murdering Lawrence at the Old Bailey last year, and Jamie Acourt, 19, and David Norris, 20, who never stood trial.

Their reactions to questioning at the inquest exasperated Michael Mansfield QC, for the Lawrence family, and the Southwark Coroner Sir Montague Levine.

"It's completely pointless. These young men have decided they are absolutely nothing on any occasion to absolutely any



Stephen Lawrence: Knifed to death waiting for a bus

called David Norris?" To laughter, he replied: "I am claiming privilege on that question."

Mr Mansfield said: "It's an abuse. He's an automaton. He's standing there claiming privilege on everything."

When Mr Norris also claimed privilege to the question of whether he was willing to listen, Sir Montague also complained.

"You have to be prepared to listen," he told Mr Norris, "otherwise it's a mockery."

Earlier, Mr Mansfield had asked Luke Knight if he had sat at the back of the court - and received the same response.

Mr Mansfield shouted: "Please think about what you are saying. You cannot just give blank answers. I want to ask you if you would be kind enough to think about the questions."

"I claim privilege," said Mr Knight. Mr Mansfield said: "You are not even prepared to say whether you can think about the question. What I suggest then is that you have all decided to come here and say nothing at all."

The young men, who all lived near the scene at the time of the attack, all gave the same response when asked by the cor-

oner whether they were present at the scene of the murder on 22 April 1993; whether they could tell the court how Stephen Lawrence received his injuries; and if they knew of anyone else who could give details concerning the circumstances of his death.

As the five men - clad for the most part in jackets, waistcoats and ties - rose to leave, the coroner issued a warning: "I wish to make this very clear, there must be no attacks on witnesses. That won't serve justice at all in any way."

They then left the court and sped away in two cars with three blooded women, refusing to comment.

Earlier, the court was told that Stephen had run 130 yards with a punctured lung and paralysed arm before collapsing and bleeding to death.

His mother, Doreen Lawrence, left the court in distress as Dr Richard Shepherd, who conducted the post-mortem examination, said the teenager was stabbed twice with a weapon similar to a kitchen knife.

The teenager then died to death, Dr Shepherd told the court. The hearing was adjourned until today.

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international

Russia resurrects spectre of nuclear holocaust

Christopher Bellamy
Defence Correspondent

Russia yesterday threatened that it might use nuclear weapons pre-emptively in future conflicts, in response to conventional attack.

The move was clearly designed to put increased pressure on Nato at the start of historic negotiations about alliance expansion to the east and a linked Nato-Russia charter.

Ivan Rybkin, the Secretary of Russia's Security Council, told the *Russkaya gazeta* daily that "in case of a direct challenge our response will be fully-fledged, and we will choose the means - including nuclear weapons".

The announcement was reported as a threat to end Russia's policy of "no first use of nuclear weapons", though many Western observers doubt whether it ever really had such a policy. There had already been indications that the idea, based on a promise Mikhail Gorbachev was abandoned in Russia's 1993 military doctrine.

The 1993 doctrine implied that nuclear states or states allied to them might be nuclear targets, whether or not they used nuclear weapons first. Yesterday's statement was clearly directed against neighbouring countries like Poland which, if it joined Nato, would be an ally of nuclear states.

Such a policy makes sense, given the appalling weakness and decomposition of Russia's conventional forces, with low morale and troops unpaid for months. Officers are now failing to turn up for work in order to earn money elsewhere.

In such circumstances, any serious attack on Russia could force the Russians to respond with nuclear weapons which intelligence sources say are still carefully controlled, despite last week's reports to the contrary.

But diplomatic and Nato sources believe yesterday's statement forms part of a classic Russian negotiating technique. At the Madrid summit in July, Nato is likely to issue invitations to some east European countries - including Poland, the Czech

Republic and Hungary, to join. The Russians like to take the strategic offensive - establishing an extreme forward position - and then exploit the tactical advantages of the defensive.

Negotiations between Nato's Secretary-General Javier Solana and the Russians started on 20 January. Since then, the Russians have made a series of statements designed to alert the West to their predicament.

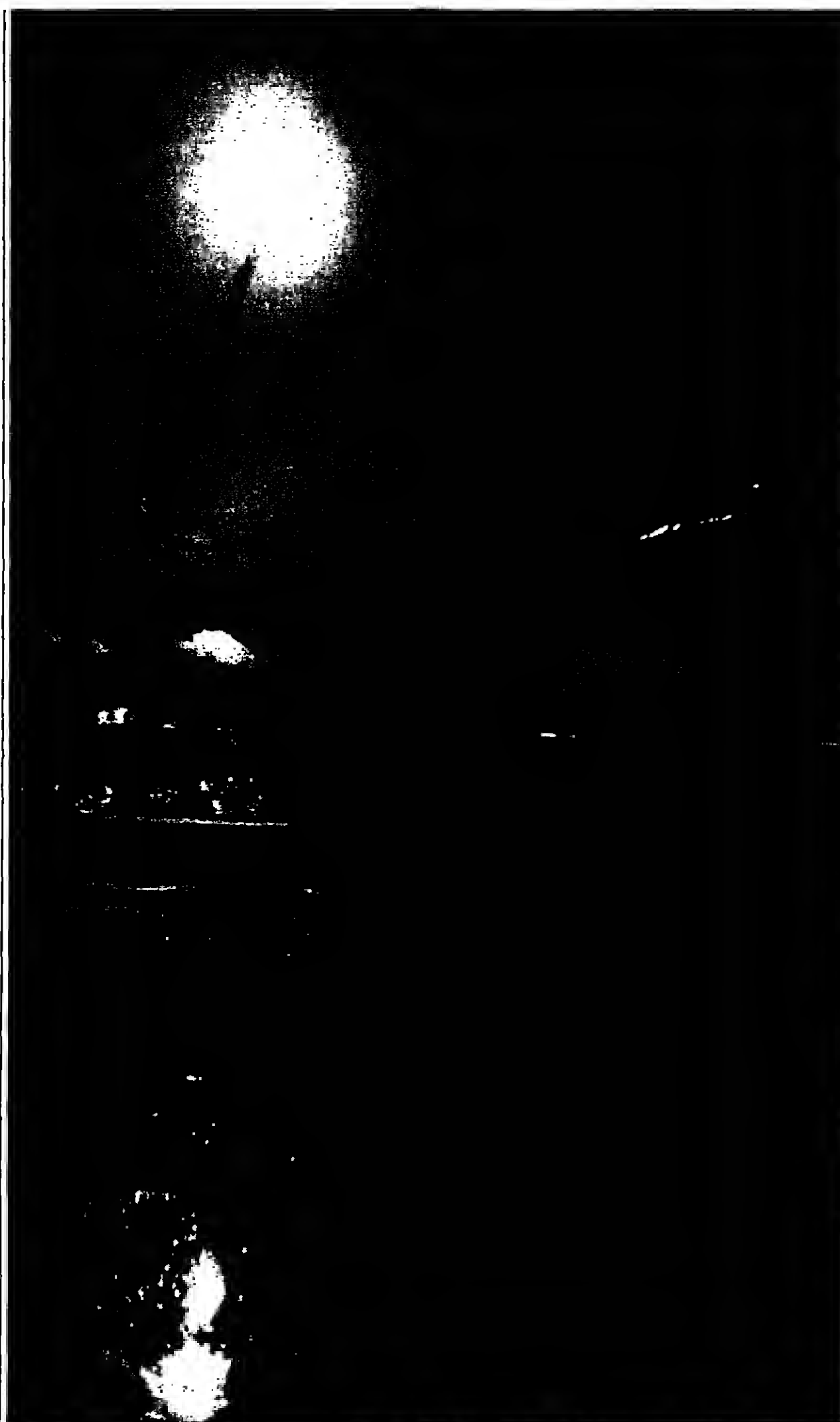
On Friday, the Secretary of the Defence Council, Yuri Barmin, and the Defence Minister, Igor Rodionov, said the nuclear forces were in danger of going out of control.

Russia has between 7,000 and 8,000 strategic nuclear weapons and an estimated 2,000 tactical warheads. But the Russians will strive to keep control over these weapons above all others. Western experts dismissed the claims as exaggerated, while admitting that the disintegration of conventional forces could make nuclear first-use more likely.

In fact, nuclear weapons security is still the responsibility of the FSB (heir to the KGB) which receives better pay and conditions than the armed forces. They have a "dual key" arrangement with the strategic missile troops of the armed forces. The threat of nuclear weapons going "out of control" relates to the reliability of staff who keep the weapons working. Nuclear weapons also have a finite shelf-life: some components degrade and therefore have to be replaced - that costs money, which is not available.

Last week's statement was designed to get more money from the *Duma* - the Russian parliament, whereas yesterday's was a clear shot across the bows of Nato and the main candidates for membership.

■ Moscow (Reuters) - A strike by hungry workers at a nuclear shipyard in the town of Severodvinsk near the northern port of Arkhangelsk could escalate into a riot unless they are quickly paid long-overdue wages, a local union leader has warned. He said there had been cases of workers fainting from hunger and a number of suicides.



Space chase: A photographer tracking the space shuttle Discovery on its pre-dawn lift-off yesterday from the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. The shuttle is carrying a crew of seven on a 10-day mission to catch up with and service the Hubble Space Telescope. Photograph: Pierre Ducharme/Reuters

significant shorts

Crashed plane held rebels, Zaire claims

A Ugandan plane taking troops to eastern Zaire crashed inside the Zairean border, a defence official in Kinshasa said. It came down on Monday in the Ruwenzori mountain area; Zairean troops captured the survivors. There was no independent confirmation of the report. Meanwhile, the rebel leader, Laurent Kabila, presided over a parade of 1,000 new troops, signalling the rapid expansion of his insurgent force. More than 10,000 residents turned out in Bukavu to see the 1,200 recruits in US-style uniforms, wellington boots and AK-47s. **Reuters - Kinshasa**

Diplomats bag coke shipment

Peruvian police are investigating smugglers who used a diplomatic bag to send 2lb of cocaine to the Peruvian mission at the UN. Diplomats in New York found the package, which was addressed to a Peruvian civil servant in the city, and came from an ex-employee of the Peruvian Foreign Ministry. **Reuters - Lima**

Britons wounded in Ethiopia

Two people were killed and nine wounded, including four tourists, when a grenade exploded in a hotel in the Ethiopian town of Harar. The dead were not identified; the wounded included two Britons, a French woman and a German, sources said. **Reuters - Addis Ababa**

French focus on immigrant law

Film directors urged the French to disobey their tough anti-immigration laws and challenged the authorities to prosecute them for breaking them. "We are guilty... of putting illegal foreign residents recently... We request being probed and put on trial," the 59 directors said in a statement in *Le Monde*. They were protesting at a law requiring citizens to report the arrival and departure of foreigners staying at their home. **Reuters - Paris**

For the love of humanity

The former minister Bernard Kouchner, founder of Médecins sans Frontières, said he was quitting French politics and going to Sudan to care for the destitute. Embittered after failing to find a constituency for next year's election, Mr Kouchner said he would return to his first career of humanitarian medicine. **Reuters - Paris**

EU passes up on London

The chairman of the group negotiating a new European Union treaty said he accepted that no British government would lift passport controls. London's EU partners would have to go it alone, the Dutch European Affairs Minister, Michiel Pijs, claimed. **Reuters - Brussels**

Israelis let women go free

Israel began releasing 31 Palestinian women, keeping a pledge made in peace talks with the Palestinians. Five women prisoners were freed hours after the releases were expected to begin at noon yesterday. **AP - Tel Aviv**

High-flyers come down to earth

The US Air Force suspended all training flights over the Gulf of Mexico and the East Coast after two new reports of close encounters between F-16s and commercial aircraft in the area, bringing to four the number of incidents over a three-day period last week. **AP - Washington**

Gem of a wildlife deal

Russia's diamond-producing Yakutia region signed a deal with the World Wide Fund for Nature to protect Arctic lakes and forests in a quarter of its territory. The Swiss-based Fund will allocate \$350,000 (£218,000) to pay for conservation projects. **Reuters - Geneva**

Aznavor on song

Charles Aznavour won best male vocal at France's Victoires de la Musique awards, in a broadcast tape-delayed to avoid interference by stagehands angered by cutbacks in unemployment insurance. **AP - Paris**

Angola peace-force warning

The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, recommended that the Security Council extend the peace-keeping mission in Angola by only one month if the Angolans fail to form a government by the end of February. The mandate for the 6,000-member UN force, the largest peace-keeping mission, expires on 28 February. **AP - New York**

Current crisis in view

The Tretyakov Gallery, home of the world's greatest collection of Russian art, is unable to pay its bills and could find its electricity switched off for non-payment, director said. "There is that danger, yes, there is that danger," said Valentin Rodionov. **Reuters - Moscow**

Germans in lather over soap star's racist slur

Imre Karacs
Bonn

Germany's leading entertainer was last night preparing to fly to Hollywood to apologise for racist remarks that have drawn a curtain on his career.

Harald Juhnke, 67-year-old singer and soap opera star, would be clearing up a "misunderstanding" with a black

security guard working at Sunset Boulevard's Mondrian Hotel, according to his agent. The source of this misunderstanding lies in a brief conversation with a guard named Bob Farrell, shortly after the actor assaulted a female hotel guest.

Though Juhnke's speech was rather slurred, owing to the large quantity of vodka he had consumed, onlookers including

the actor's son clearly heard him address Mr Ferrell in English with: "You filthy nigger". "Filder was right," he added for good measure. "The likes of you should have been gassed."

The slur, which Juhnke first claimed not to have remembered and later denied, has whipped up a storm of protest in Germany, with employers rushing to terminate their con-

tracts with the actor. Two public television stations and the private channel Premiere have cancelled shows starring him. A computer retailer pulled the plug on its advertising campaign featuring Juhnke.

The country's biggest star is facing bankruptcy. The advertising contract was worth 1.5m German marks. The canned television serial *Clinic under the*

Palms, to be shot in the Caribbean, would have netted him DM300,000. Also gone are show appearances worth DM250,000, and gas and concerts at DM50,000 a throw.

"Such statements are unacceptable from a German," the spokesman of the right-wing Christian Social Union said. There have been rejoinders from other politicians, includ-

ing two deputy speakers of the Bundestag.

Juhnke had been thrown out of the hotel bar when he was detained by the guard while chasing a woman through the lobby.

Drunk or not, his racist remarks are punishable by a jail term of up to five years in Germany. Prosecutors in his home town, Berlin, have already begun proceedings.

Albanians torch ruling party's HQ

Andrew Gumbel

One day after running the police out of town in pitched street battles, the furious citizens of Vlora, Albania's second city, set fire to the headquarters of the ruling Democratic Party yesterday. They chanted slogans accusing the government of murder as they joined the funeral cortege of a man shot dead during the riots.

As they walked across town behind the coffin which carried Artur Rustemi, 33, a vegetable store owner who had piled hundreds of dollars into a local "pyramid" investment scheme, as many as 40,000 mourners shouted: "The police killed him! The government killed him!"

Balkan turbulence: While anarchy threatens Vlora, a logjam in the Belgrade parliament is holding back democrats' hopes

The anger of the population seemed unabated by the terrifying escalation of violence, which turned the city centre into a smouldering wreck on Monday, or by the threat to impose a state of emergency on the area. Deputies were still debating the issue last night in parliament in the Albanian capital, Tirana.

Vlora has been badly hit by the failure of many of Albania's so-called pyramid schemes - pseudo-banks that offer unrealistically high rates of interest - because the amount of money at stake there is higher than

in the rest of the country. The port city has grown rich on racketeering, whether of arms, drugs or illegal immigrants, and the collapse of the local pyramid company, Gjallica, last week, involving the estimated loss of more than £300m, has robbed Vlora of much of its accumulated wealth.

The government has failed to convince the country that it had no part in the pyramid schemes and has maintained control in most areas through sheer intimidation, involving armed and plainclothes police, mass arrests and random beatings.

The protesters in Vlora have been thwarted, because army units have taken up positions in the hills around the city and on the main roads, but it could still become reality.

"It seems an impossible plan, but you have to remember that these are people who in the past have walked across almost all of Greece on foot," said one

Tirana journalist who did not wish to be named.

The crisis can only get worse, as it is probably a matter of days or weeks at the most, before the largest of the pyramid schemes, holding the life-savings of hundreds of thousands of people, crumbles in turn.

The opposition, despite the constant harassment and physical attacks on its leaders, has demanded a cross-party dialogue and the establishment of a national unity government. Significantly, that proposal has met with some sympathy even in government circles. There are

signs of cracks appearing in the power base of President Sali Berisha and his Prime Minister, Aleksander Meksi.

Bashkim Kopliku, a former deputy prime minister and one of the parliament's business committee, has joined the calls for the government to resign.

There also appears to be a growing split between President Berisha and Mr Meksi, with each hoping to save his own skin by blaming the other for the débâcle.

The foreign community, meanwhile, is hoping that the crisis can be resolved without a full-scale breakdown of public order. Diplomats are starting to consider the possibility of a transitional period, followed by new parliamentary elections.



President Milosevic: Urged to open dialogue with opponents

Radicals try to delay Serbian elections bill

Belgrade (Reuters/AP) - Serbia's parliament met in extraordinary session yesterday to consider a bill reinstating opposition victories in municipal elections last November, but ultra-nationalists seemed determined to delay its passage.

Opposition politicians, meanwhile, vowed to keep up the pressure on the authoritarian president, Slobodan Milosevic, by continuing their pro-democ-

rary rallies in Belgrade's streets. Keeping up the pressure on President Milosevic for more democratic change, Belgrade students rallied and then marched to the parliament building, where they placed a huge artificial brain - a suggestion that those inside parliament had none.

The parliament approved the naming of Radmila Milentijevic as the new Information

Minister, and some other changes in the cabinet. A hardliner who has supported Mr Milosevic's nationalist policies in the past, Mrs Milentijevic has been sharply criticised by the opposition.

The ministers of justice and interior, whose firing was demanded by the opposition, were not among the seven ministers dismissed. However, in what appeared to be a small concession

to protesting students, the minister of education was removed. Mr Milosevic's Socialists had annulled opposition victories in 14 towns and cities on grounds of "irregularities". The action prompted three months of huge protests and attracted strident international criticism. But a week ago the president suddenly announced he was asking parliament to approve a bill recognising the opposition gains.

The three-party opposition Zajedno (Together) coalition saw the move as a climbdown and a triumph outcome of protests in Belgrade and other cities.

Meanwhile, on Saturday Madeleine Albright, the United States Secretary of State, issued a personal appeal to Mr Milosevic, urging him to ensure the disputed election results were reinstated and to open a dialogue with his opponents.

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City hall against the world: Local governments confront nation-states, corporations and trade blocs

Boston takes on EU over Burma trade

David Usborne
New York

The US state of Massachusetts has pitted itself against both Japan and the European Union in a highly unusual international trade dispute. It has exercised what amounts to its own foreign policy by boycotting firms doing business with Burma, in protest at that regime's human rights abuses. The row has reached a new pitch after the delivery of a letter this week to the EU by members of the Massachusetts delegation to the United States Congress. The letter, similar to one sent last week to Japan, chastises the EU for lodging a complaint about the boycott with the Clinton administration. The boycott was signed into law last August by the governor of Massachusetts, William Weld. Conceived as a sanctions measure against the military junta in Burma, it forbids the state from doing business with companies with interests in that country, or choosing them for pension fund investments.

Behind the dispute is concern about the implications of individual states and cities passing laws with international trading consequences over which Washington has no influence. Nor is the alarm confined to foreign companies and governments. Also raising the red flag recently was a spokesman for General Electric. "I have a basic problem with 50 different states doing things as if they were the State Department," he said. While the state is alone in having such a law, 10 US cities, including San Francisco, have passed selective procurement laws designed to punish companies with operations in Burma. Among companies that have been moved to withdraw from Burma as a result are Apple Computer, which feared losing a contract with the Massachusetts school system. The EU and Japan have notified the State Department that they consider the Massachusetts provisions illegal. They say it could be the subject of official complaints to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In the

EU, Ericsson of Sweden was recently persuaded to withdraw from the bidding for an emergency radio system contract in San Francisco because of its Burma links. The European Union Ambassador to the US, Hugo Faenens, said the measure is "a breach of US international obligations and as such could have damaging effect on bilateral EU-US relations". Among those angered by the reaction is the Massachusetts Democrat Barney Frank. "I particularly resent both the EU and Japan trying to interfere with Massachusetts, particularly since we pay for their defence," he remarked. London (Reuters) — Political repression and human rights violations in Burma last year reached their highest levels since the violent state suppression of a popular uprising at the end of the 1980s, Amnesty International said. Amnesty urged the international community to redouble pressure on the Burmese authorities to improve their human rights record.



Burmese forced labour: Such flagrant rights abuses have angered Massachusetts

Photograph: Jan Benning/Katz

A global view from the ethnic back yard

The combination of local government and foreign policy sounds odd, if not risible. In Britain it summons up memories of nuclear-free zones and concerns for Nicaragua — more about gesture than reality, even if the gestures were heartfelt.

But as the two examples which we present today show, local — that is to say, non-national — government is at the cutting edge of politics.

To an extent, this is a result of the revival of ethnic nationalism, which feeds moves for autonomy, as in Flanders, the Basque country or Catalonia. But there is more to it than that, as the case of Boston vs Brussels shows. Local government is taking up arms: to defend itself in a global economy; to assert the values which citizens feel their national governments ignore; and to follow that old nostrum of the Green movement: Think Global, Act Local.

Closer to home, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and parts of England are taking the "Westminster Bypass", a route that lies through Brussels. That means negotiating for funds, but also lobbying for or against particular policies.

Central government is insufficiently flexible to represent regional views. This is not just a matter of bumptious local officials getting above themselves, it is the crumbling of the very idea of "national interest".

Traditional "high" foreign policy — military and security matters — remains the preserve of nation states. But "low" policy issues — trade, the environment, communications and so on — are increasingly taking centre stage. When guns are at stake, then Brixton or Bremen might not have much to say. When it's butter, then they do.

In this new world, city hall and corporations clash and cooperate with states and international organisations. It makes the world a much more complicated, unpredictable and multi-dimensional place.

Andrew Marshall

Tax battles stir up rebellion in the regions

Elizabeth Nash Madrid
Andrew Gumbel Rome
Sarah Helm Brussels

Taxation is fast becoming the most important battleground in the fight by Europe's independently-minded regions for greater autonomy. But, whereas in Scotland the debate has centred on the right of a new Scottish assembly to raise taxes above levels in the rest of Britain, in Spain, Belgium and Italy the position is reversed: the Basques, Flemish and Northern League want to reduce the burden of taxation. A conflict is simmering between Madrid and the Basque country over corporate tax, which the Basque government last year cut to a rate lower

than in the rest of Spain — from 35 to 32.5 per cent. Its aim is to attract more investment to the region and offset the damaging effects of terrorism and industrial decline. But Madrid says the Basques have no right to impose the lower rate and in September hung down a court challenge to the Basque government. The national government fears that the incentive offers too tempting a sweetener for companies and that other regions will be put at a disadvantage. It also fears that other autonomous regions might get the same idea. The measure does not affect the amount of tax remitted to Madrid, which remains, in accordance with a devolution pact drawn up after Franco's death, at 6.24 per cent of Spain's

national spending on defence, foreign affairs and the monarchy. The Basque government takes the view that it is up to them how they raise that sum. "What we gather in taxes doesn't affect how much we pay the state," said the Basque Prime Minister, Jose Antonio Ardanza, recently. The signs are that the Basque incentives are working. The British-based Coopers & Lybrand accountancy group moved its Spanish base from Madrid to near Bilbao last year, principally for tax reasons, they said, and others are following. The Basques have also squeezed from the government a concession to collect taxes on petrol, tobacco and alcohol. Catalonia, too, has fought for greater control over its tax revenue,

but this time over income tax, in a formula which the Catalan leader Jordi Pujol seeks to generalise throughout Spain. Under a deal struck between the ruling Catalan nationalists and the minority government in Madrid, regions will retain a third of income tax raised within their territory; this clearly benefits the richer regions like Catalonia. In the previous setup, the regions had to apply to Madrid for repayment of their share. Similar patterns are repeated in Italy and Belgium, both countries experiencing strong centrifugal forces. The regional government of Flanders has already won far-reaching autonomy within the Belgian federal system, and wants to win authority over tax and social security from the central state.

The Flemish leaders complain that Flanders, a relatively prosperous region of Belgium, is currently having to dish out vast sums to help pay the social security bills of the more impoverished French-speakers in southern Wallonia, where unemployment is as high as 20 per cent in some areas. If it were not for the problems of Wallonia, Belgium would have no problem meeting the Maastricht criteria for monetary union, say the Flemish. In Italy, the Northern League has been calling for a regionally-based tax system so that money earned in the north is not siphoned off by the "thieves in Rome" and redistributed to a centre and south that the League's exponents consider to be irretrievably backward and corrupt.

The reason why taxes have become an issue is partly that the Basque country, Flanders and northern Italy are all wealthier regions than average for their states. Taxation has historically aimed at redistribution of income to the lower-paid but also to the poorer areas, in part to assure the very state cohesion which is questioned by the separatists and by advocates of greater autonomy. In Belgium, opponents of decentralisation argue that granting Flanders autonomy over tax and social security would hit at the heart of the state, increasing the possibility that Belgium itself might one day break up. Yet that — for the more radically minded Flemish separatists — is precisely the point.

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international

Enter the dragon: Shanghai comeback challenges financial might of Hong Kong

Teresa Poole
Shanghai

On Shanghai's waterfront Bund, once the financial centre of Asia, the flagships of old wealth find it politically acceptable again to trade on former glories. The Peace Hotel, known as the Cathay Hotel when Noël Coward stayed and penned *Private Lives*, has turned its top floor into an international bankers' club, "a place specially used for social contact and communications between celebrities of financial circles". As its regulations announce, "sloppily dressed" people are not welcome.

In Shanghai, the (smartly dressed) international banker is again a creature to be welcomed. The city has set ambitious targets to reclaim some of the stature of its Thirties hey-

day. "We have worked out a three-phase action plan," said Wang Zhan, director of the government's Development Research Centre: to be China's national financial centre before 2000, Asia's regional financial hub by 2005, and a global financial centre in 2010.

Where, then, does that leave Hong Kong? Is the "dragon's head" of the Yangtze River, as Shanghai is officially described, set to eclipse Hong Kong after sovereignty reverts to China? "By 2010, I think Shanghai will be a city that stands out as a regional financial centre, on a par with Hong Kong if not ahead," said Douglas Red, general manager of the Shanghai branch of the merchant bank, ING.

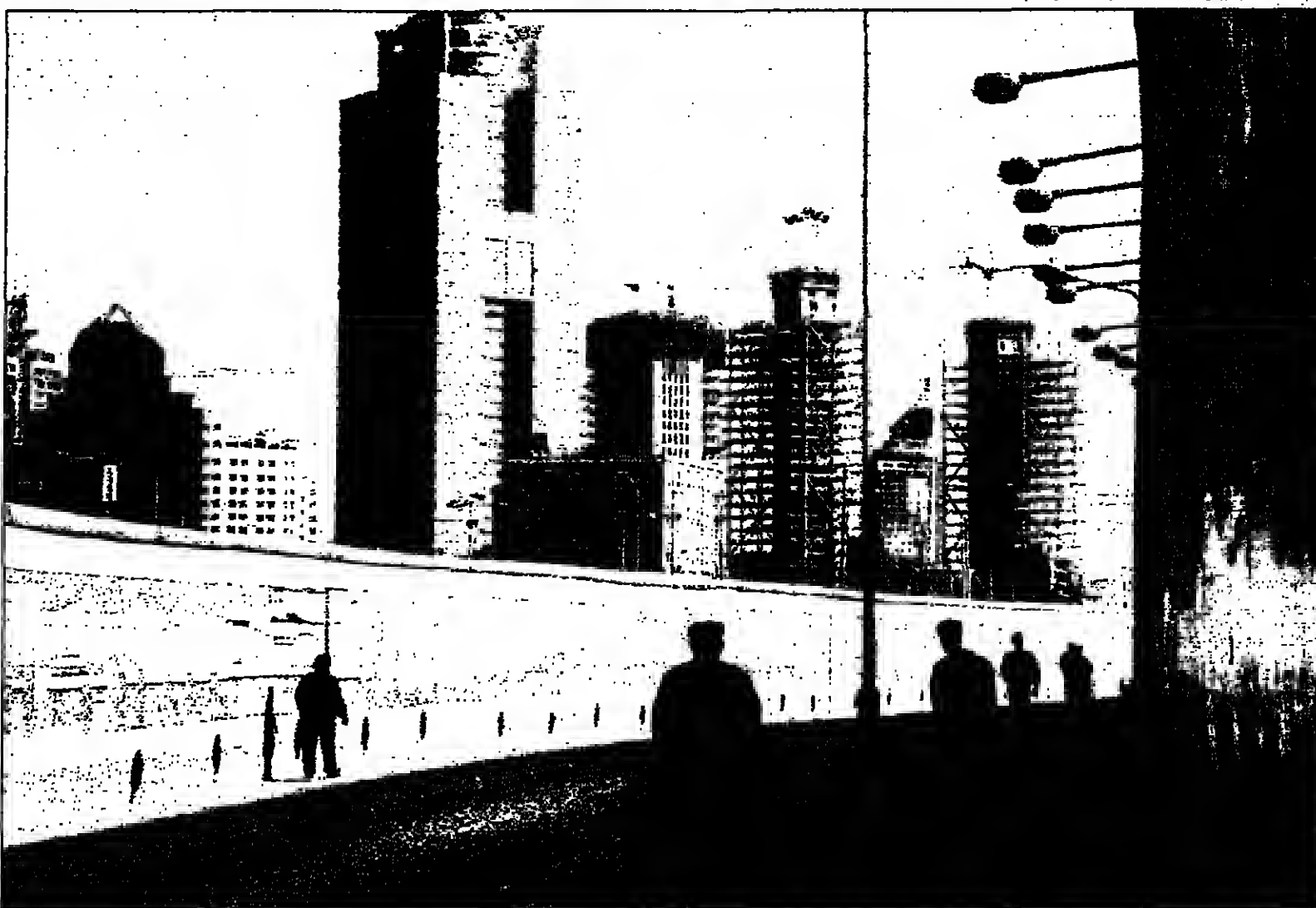
By Chinese standards, modern Shanghai is a late starter. For decades, the city was used

as a cash cow by the communist government and between 1949 and 1983 remitted 87 per cent of its revenues to Peking. After market reform was launched in 1978, Shanghai's relative economic status declined sharply as Peking instead promoted an export-oriented boom in southern China.

The turning point for Shanghai was 18 April 1990, when the central government launched the Pudong district, across the river from the Bund, as China's future financial centre.

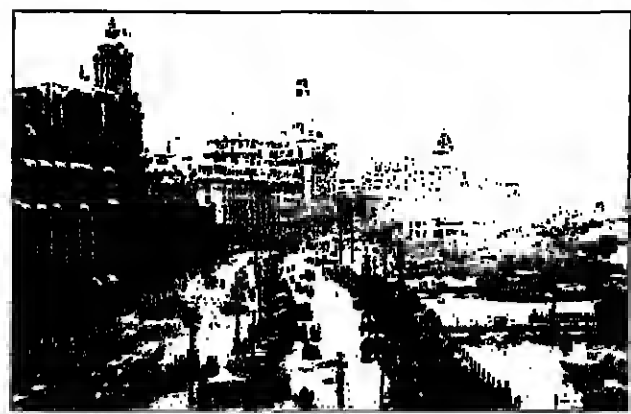
The results, as Mr Red said, have been "startling". "In 1990, there was very little in the way of foreign investment and foreign presence in Shanghai. [Today] the foreign community is growing dramatically, the infrastructure has developed in a way which I would say is the envy of most metropolitan areas in China, and the growth seems set to continue," he said.

The physical transformation has been probably the fastest of any city on earth. Annual promised overseas investment in Shanghai has surpassed \$10bn (£6bn) a year for the past three years and in Pudong there are more than 4,000 foreign-funded financial and manufacturing companies. There is enough office space to satisfy all foreseeable demand and rents have slumped. Even so, this year, another 3 million square feet will become available in Pudong alone, with 140 high-rise buildings under construction.



New business: The district of Pudong in Shanghai which is poised to rival Hong Kong as a financial centre

Photograph: G Pinkassow/Magnum



Old times: The Bund, as it would have looked to Noël Coward in Shanghai's Thirties heyday

Photograph: Hulton Getty

Hong Kong, while fearing competition, also has a vested interest in Shanghai's future. It is the biggest investor in Shanghai, and accounts for more than 40 per cent of foreign funds promised for Pudong. Business links are strong: many Hong Kong moguls, including the future chief executive Tung Chee-nga, are displaced Shanghaiese, whose families fled when the Communists took control in 1949.

The question is whether—and when—Shanghai's revival will start to undermine Hong Kong. The colony's greatest asset, its

natural deep-water port, means that it handles nearly half of China's exports; it will take years of river-dredging before Shanghai is able to handle the next generation of container ships. As a financial centre, even Chinese officials for the time being play down Shanghai's threat to Hong Kong. Li Qian, the spokeswoman at the Shanghai Stock Exchange, defines the future relationship as "co-operation and competition". The onus is on Shanghai to implement further reform. At the moment, the total value of companies quoted on the Hong

Kong stock market is seven times the Shanghai market, and most of the shares in China are still "A" shares which can be purchased only by Chinese. Similarly, there are already 44 foreign branches of international financial institutions in Shanghai. But it is only very recently, and after agreeing to put branches in Pudong, that a handful of foreign banks has been given permission to conduct limited local-currency business. Many of Shanghai's barriers—including the prerequisite of a freely convertible currency—can be solved by central gov-

ernment edict, and probably will be over the next few years. But other requirements of a world financial centre are less tangible, such as a free press, a transparent regulatory and legal system, low corruption, and an ease of entry for foreign players. By all these counts, Hong Kong is in a different world to Shanghai. The question, after 1 July this year, when the British colony reverts to China, is whether these relative advantages will be eroded because of greater mainland influence in Hong Kong. By Mr Wang's dates, the first phase of Shanghai's renaissance

is on target. His second goal is more of a challenge; Hong Kong is the bridge for international finance into China and will remain so until foreign banks see Shanghai as a place to put their Greater China or East Asia regional headquarters.

Some time in the next century that is likely to happen. But there are those who think that Shanghai's renaissance does not have to be at Hong Kong's expense. At the Pudong New Area Administration Office, Fan Zonglin said: "China is very big, so two business centres is not too many."

Executions blamed for ethnic riots

Chris Bird
Reuters

Almaty — The leader of an exiled nationalist Uighur group in Kazakhstan said yesterday that riots in China's predominantly Muslim north-west were sparked by the execution of 30 Uighurs by the Chinese authorities last week.

"We have heard that 30 people, Uighurs, were executed by a firing squad," Yusupbek Mukhlisi, leader of the United National Revolutionary Front of East Turkistan, said in the capital Almaty.

He said that the public executions were carried out in the town of Yining, about 50 kilometres (30 miles) from the Kazakh border in China's north-western Xinjiang province, last Friday.

"When the parents and families saw this, they lost their patience," said Mr Mukhlisi. He said that the executions fell on the fifth anniversary of the decision made by some Uighur separatist groups to use violence to secure independence from Peking.

Chinese sources say 10 people were killed and about 100 wounded in the resulting riots by pro-separatist Uighurs. However, Mr Mukhlisi said the casualties were higher, with 25 Uighurs and 55 Chinese soldiers killed in the violence.

Chinese residents in Yining, called Kuldzha by the Uighurs, said the town had been sealed off by Chinese police and that a curfew was in place following

the riots.

Mr Mukhlisi said hundreds of Uighurs had been arrested after the rioting. "They have run out of room at the prisons and are putting people in cellars," he said.

Information from the remote region is difficult to verify. Mukhlisi said telephone lines to and from Kazakhstan had been cut, and most information was reaching Almaty from Uighur travellers.

A Chinese official source in Almaty said the unrest was to be expected. "It is a multi-ethnic region so it doesn't surprise me," said the source.

The region is home to ethnic Kazakhs and Kyrgyz as well as Uighurs and Han Chinese. "The [Uighur] separatists are stirring this up," the source added.

Local authorities have played down the riot, describing it as a small incident started by "foreign hostile forces".

The Xinjiang authorities last year cracked down on the Uighur separatists, Turkic-speaking Muslims who make up the majority of the region's population, after a series of violent clashes, bombings and assassination attempts on officials and Muslim leaders regarded as pro-Peking.

Peking also imposed tougher border controls along the vast region of mountains and desert, saying it wanted to halt the smuggling of arms from the neighbouring central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Freedom petition for jailed Wang

Mure Dickie
Reuters

Peking — The family of the jailed Chinese dissident Wang Dan is planning to petition a Peking court to overturn his 11-year jail sentence for plotting to overthrow the government, the former student leader's mother said yesterday.

The petition would be a mainly symbolic gesture to the legal authorities that last year convicted Wang in a trial lasting only four hours, said his mother Wang Lingyun.

"There is no optimism over the result," she said in a telephone interview. "This is an expression of our attitude."

Wang's family had already prepared documents for the petition, which they expected to submit to the Peking Higher

People's Court later this month, she said.

"In accordance with the legal system, after Wang Dan's appeal, he himself or his family are allowed to submit a petition," said the 61-year-old museum researcher, who helped to defend her son during his trial last year.

"I've written a first draft but I haven't sent it yet," she said. "I need to tidy it up before submitting it to the court."

Chinese legal experts say that submitting petitions to overturn verdicts which have already survived an appeal have almost no chance of succeeding in forcing a retrial.

Wang Dan was one of the leaders of the pro-democracy student protests of 1989 that were crushed by the Chinese army with heavy loss of life. He was sentenced last October.

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Why women voting reform

Why women are so keen to vote in the next election is a question that has been asked many times. The answer is simple: they want to make a difference. Women are the backbone of the nation, and their votes are crucial in determining the future of the country. They are the ones who are most affected by the decisions made by the government, and they have the right to be heard. Women are the ones who are most responsible for the well-being of the nation, and they have the right to be heard. Women are the ones who are most responsible for the well-being of the nation, and they have the right to be heard.

Full marks for consensus on education

Here is Question One in the new, revised Advanced (Subsidiary) Level examination in education. Which post-war prime minister first used the phrase "secret garden" to describe the curriculum and the way it is taught in school classrooms? Was it - we offer this multiple-choice format to those whose attention may have been slipping during the recent phoney war between Government and Opposition - a) John Major; b) Alec Douglas-Home or c) James Callaghan? It is true that Home was a great horticulturist but the correct answer is Labour prime minister Callaghan, who in a speech at Nuffield College in the Seventies launched a Great Debate on education and - incidentally - spelled the end of an era for autonomous local education authorities. Eleven years on, his secret garden has not just been opened to visitors but is busily being trampled upon by inspectors, parents and politicians.

Yesterday Prime Minister Major reached out for the same phrase. To him it served as another way of saying that councils (by which he naturally means Labour-controlled councils) and teachers are far too close. But that partisan usage misses the point. The degree of convergence between the parties on education during the past decade has been quite extraordinary and yesterday's flurry of announcements by the Prime Minister, Educa-

tion Secretary, their shadows, and Liberal Democrats, served to underline that fact. On schools most of us now agree. In fact, the base consensus on education is a little unnerving.

Since Callaghan, actual policy has of course been delivered by the Tories. Keith Joseph reformed examinations at 16-plus by merging the General Certificate of Education and the General Certificate of Secondary Education, so fulfilling an old Labour wish. Kenneth Baker inaugurated the national curriculum which - once the rhetoric and the party folderols had been stripped aside - answered a long-standing Labour aspiration.

So yesterday turned into an exhibition of mutual clothes stealing. "Kleptomaniac", the Prime Minister cried as he dipped deep into the mixed bag of policies assembled in recent months by David Blunkett for Labour. On testing, the measurement of performance, the use of inspection, schools management, parent choice ... if you look at what they are actually doing or promising to do, rather than listen to the soundbites, the differences of principle fade away.

What differences persist are most obviously on questions of organisation, several tiers away from the classroom. Labour tends to favour residual council controls, which is of course partly a reflection of the fact it runs so many. The Conservatives, once the party of



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the little platoons and local diversity, these days favours central control with a high degree of individual school autonomy. But even here the real differences between the parties are hard to spot. Both would send in hit-teams of inspectors to run underperforming schools, and to bring inadequate local authorities up to standard. Labour would publish information on attainment by children locally, on the practical grounds that the performance of children in schools halfway across the country is largely irrelevant to the choices parents have before them. But Labour also has no objection in prin-

ciple to collecting data nationally, for example through the Audit Commission. Some parents send their children across boundaries and need to have access to data provided out of area; the sensible solution is to ensure that data is provided in standard formats which makes it collectible and collatable by central agencies (including newspapers). The issue of national versus local league tables is thus a red herring: the point is that no one, including most sensible teachers, dissents from the principle of comparison.

A twist was added yesterday with the suggestion that the appraisal of teach-

ers should be linked with their performance as measured by their pupils' performance. Once this would have brought the roof down, with Labour and the trade unions joined in pernicious opposition to progress. No longer. The question becomes one of detail and practicality: do tests at seven, 11 and 14 provide enough information; do they assist heads in getting the measure of underperforming staff? Often, it is true, information sounds like a stick with which to beat education's professionals. Understandably, they must feel they are being required to carry many of the burdens of change and improvement - the political class wills the ends of educational improvement but decrees it can be had without increased means. Put that more simply, there has recently been a lot of stick and not much carrot.

Similarly Gillian Shephard's pronouncements yesterday on A-levels raised hardly a flutter from her Labour shadow. He might have said (we would say, ought) that an opportunity for radical reorganisation of 18-plus has been squandered. What Mrs Shephard offered was rationalisation of the examination boards. Fine: who is going to dissent from that proposition, other than those schools which have lately and blatantly been playing the field. Did David Blunkett object to Mrs Shephard's plans? How could he. Perhaps, in office, he will pick up the

threads left dangling from Sir Ron Dearing's report. Then it will be his Shadow's turn to mouth objection while getting on with agreeing.

Noting and applauding the convergence of the parties' education thinking may offend those who think the best policy is born in dissension. Fortunately they are wrong: the fact that the political class is pretty much of one mind on the way forward, and that their view largely aligns with the wishes of parents should be an occasion for celebration.

The Spice Girls for ever?

How long will the Spice Girls last? The answer is for ever. Official Their collected works will henceforth be statutorily kept for future generations along with every other CD released in Britain, every film, every TV programme, and every CD-Rom, under new provisions. With the electronic information explosion, says the Government, it is no longer sufficient to keep books in perpetuity in the British Library. For those of us who lament the BBC failing to preserve the early Peter Cook and Dudley Moore and other classics, there is indeed a logic to storing some true treasures. But for the rest - shouldn't popular culture be as perishable as possible?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Supertankers heading for the rocks

Sir: The first anniversary of the *Sea Empress* disaster falls on 15 February. Little progress has been made since.

The *Sea Empress* ran on to rocks because, like all tankers of its size, it was dangerously unmanoeuvrable and far too massive to be towed out of danger by any tug in the world. Bringing ships which take many minutes to turn, and many miles to stop, into coastal waters invites disaster. Expecting tugs to pull them out of danger causes that the disasters will become catastrophes.

Oil tanker design, driven by international speculation, has evaded all effective regulation since the Second World War. None of the disaster inquiries has questioned the fundamental flaws in these monstrous ships. Either because they were confidential (*Sea Empress*), ill-composed (*Drifter*) or charged with restricted terms of reference (*Econ Valdez*), none of the inquiries addressed the fundamental questions of tanker design and tanker size.

The latest perverse decision by the British government to rush up the *Sea Empress* disaster within an in-house inquiry ensures that further such catastrophes will occur, and can only fuel speculation that they already believe themselves to be legally and financially responsible for what occurred in Milford Haven that night 12 months ago.

Since the British government isn't going to come clean, we must lobby Neil Kinnock, the EU Commissioner for Transport, to hold a proper open inquiry, not only into the *Sea Empress*, but into the general question of supertanker safety.

Between 30 and 60 per cent of all supertankers cause a devastating pollution incident (more than 10,000 tonnes of oil spilled) during their lives (US National Academy of Science figure).

Professor MICHAEL DISNEY (Department of Physics and Astronomy, University of Wales, Cardiff)

MATHIAS DISNEY MSc (Remote Sensing Unit, University College London)

Why women need voting reform
Sir: We welcome any moves to make the selection procedures for prospective parliamentary candidates more open to women ("Role-play to give women that vital push for Parliament", 11 February). However, one of the main barriers to selection of women remains our electoral system.

It is no accident that countries with a high proportion of women MPs, such as Sweden with over 40 per cent or Norway with 39 per cent, use a different electoral system. Under the UK system, selection committees have to choose one candidate. In safe seats they have probably not had to make a decision like this for 20 to 30 years. Perhaps not surprisingly, they often play safe, trying to pick someone as much like their last MP as possible, only younger, and end up seeing another white man.

In contrast, under electoral systems with more than one candidate per constituency it makes sense for local parties to present a balanced slate, including candidates from a range of backgrounds, women as well as



men, to appeal to all sections of the electorate. It also becomes harder to justify selecting mainly men.

We might just believe that any individual candidate selected at the moment was the best person for the job, but if we were to be presented with a list containing hardly any women, and even fewer black or Asian candidates, the discrimination would appear far more obvious.

MARY-ANN STEPHENSON (Women's Society, London EC2)

Lessons on the Holocaust
Sir: Of course it is foolish to make denying the Holocaust a criminal offence (Letters, 4, 7, 10 February). But anyone who says that a well-attested historical event did not take place is clearly unfit to teach at any level, from school to university. He or she would also lack the balanced understanding needed by those who work for central or local government. Clearly what is needed is some measure to exclude those who deny that the Holocaust happened from work to which their unbalanced minds are misused.

ERNEST RUDD (York)

Sir: I am appalled at the generalisation made by Becky Johns ("Muslims who deny Holocaust", Letters, 7 February) about young Muslims. The experience of your writer is limited to those students who study English as a second language - a very small minority of young Muslims.

I am a father of two university-educated Muslim children and

have also worked with many young Muslims through my association with a local community in Harrow. I can say that it is mischievous to suggest that these young Muslims deny the Holocaust or will gloat at the truth of it. They may be indifferent to events that happened more than 50 years ago which have not affected them.

UZAIR M RIZKI (Pinxten, Middlesex)

Water utilities paid their way
Sir: How nice to receive a letter from Mr Major on the dangers of the "windfall tax".

However, there is one sentence in his letter I find baffling. He says: "Companies which used to devour huge subsidies from the taxpayer now pay large amounts of tax to the Exchequer." Which companies is he referring to?

I know a little bit about the water industry, and no subsidy was paid to the old water authorities. They borrowed, of course, to fund capital expenditure (just as the privatised companies do) and mainly from the National Loans Fund, but a commercial rate of interest was charged by the NLF and eventually recovered from the customers. The same is true, I believe, of the other utilities.

The only nationalised industries which "devoured" any significant subsidies were rail (nothing's changed there) and coal (which has been virtually shut down and

certainly isn't "paying large amounts of tax").

DAVID GADBURY (East Grinstead, Sussex)

Misguided liberal gloss on the Bible

Sir: Shock! Horror! According to the Rev Kenneth Wilson's letter (8 February), 200 years of biblical scholarship has discovered that there are cultural aspects to the Bible.

But that has always been recognised by theologians. God spoke in particular cultures at particular times. But what He spoke in and through those cultures was culture-transcending truth. Mr Wilson seems to think that somehow we in the 20th century no longer have cultural baggage. We can look down our noses at the poor culture-bound writers of the Bible. But his letter is full of cultural assumptions - anti-supernaturalism and feminism for example.

If Mr Wilson finds the teachings of the Bible on everything from a transcendent God and the substitutionary death of Christ to family relationships so repugnant, why does he not do the decent thing, renounce his ordination vows and stop calling himself a Christian? Perhaps the Rationalist Press Association would give him a job. But I doubt he will do that, because "Liberal Christianity" is intellectually dishonest.

The Rev GUY A DAVIES (St Albans, Dorset)

Self-reliance the key to defence

Sir: Paul Valley ("How Blair can save billions on defence", 10 February) dismisses many capabilities of our armed forces as unnecessary, and makes several suggestions that can never be practical.

Do we need tanks at all? Yes, we do, as great though helicopters are, they cannot take and hold territory. They are needed to guard the armoured personnel carriers that carry our troops, and they are vulnerable to hand-held surface-to-air missiles.

Tomahawks can never totally replace attack aircraft, as their unit cost makes that decision very uneconomic compared with an aircraft that can be re-used.

We train and equip our forces for high-intensity conflict because then they are prepared for all eventualities. Situations can change very quickly, and troops could go in intending to peace-keep and end up inside a major conflict. Then we would not have the time to run to the Americans for help, or persuade a European committee.

By all means integrate Europe's defence industries, but we have to maintain a capability to conduct limited high-intensity warfare, in support of Nato, our European partners, or even for our own national interest. We cannot totally rely on other nations.

KEN O'NEILL (London SW14)

Sir: Paul Valley makes some excellent points ("How Blair can save billions on defence", 10 February), but unfortunately he repeats the fallacy that no savings can be made by axing the Trident nuclear weapon system. Even after most of the building work is completed, Trident will continue to cost huge amounts of money.

Sir Ronald Mason (former Chief Scientific Adviser at the Ministry of Defence) estimates the total cost of Trident as £50bn. British nuclear weapons take up more than 7 per cent of the defence budget and cost over £1.5bn per year to maintain. That's a bigger potential saving than withdrawing the Army from Germany.

A British defence review that includes neither Trident nor Nato can hardly be called strategic, or be taken seriously.

DAVID KNIGHT (Chair, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, London N7)

My UN views

Sir: Your article "Europe urges Annan to reform the UN" (21 January) is doubly wrong. I certainly do not support the closing down of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development or of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation. In fact, the exact opposite is the case. I believe that the functions these organisations carry out are of great importance and that both should be sustained in a reformed United Nations.

JAMES GUSTAVE SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme, New York)

Only the gullible pay to be frozen

Sir: The article "The cryonics game" (7 February) gives a misleading impression of the scientific basis of cryonics. Frankly, there isn't one.

To summarise comments by scientists on the South African "breakthrough" as "tsk-tsk" is neither informative nor accurate, and it simply is not true that "the world is getting closer to [the cryonics] point of view".

The experiments to which the article refers emphatically have not demonstrated an effective method for the preservation of organs by deep freezing - in fact they take us no nearer to the cryonics goal than the failed experiments carried out by Audrey Smith, at the National Institute for Medical Research, in 1957. We now know much more about the reasons for their failure, but that knowledge has yet to yield a significant advance in organ preservation.

Nor should readers forget that, even if the problems of deep-freezing living organs are solved, the cryonists will have additional problems to contend with. Extending the technique from organs to whole people; restoring the dead to life; curing the diseases or injuries that lead to their death; and all with perfect restoration of memory and personality.

It really is not surprising that so very few people have signed up for cryonic suspension.

The true situation cannot be better summarised than it was by Peter and Jean McDawar, who wrote in *Arcticle to Zoos*: "In our opinion, money invested to preserve human life in the deep freeze is money wasted, the sums involved being large enough to fulfil a punitive function as a self-imposed fine for gullibility and vanity."

DAVID E PAGE (Medical Cryobiology Unit, University of York)

Greetings cards always delayed

Sir: I share Mervyn Benford's concern about the increasing inclination of the Post Office to ignore the first-class stamp and make its own idiosyncratic judgements about when to deliver our mail (letter, 8 February).

We have a daughter at school in Newbury who telephones home most days, which enables us to keep an exact record of the arrival of items we post in her.

Post people seem to think that postcards must be frivolous - they cannot possibly contain any urgent message. So postcards sink to the bottom of the pile and always take two or three days. Anything that can easily be identified as a greetings card seems to be automatically sifted out of the first-class system. I have overcome the problem by disguising every card in a plain white business-like envelope - a ruse that is almost always successful.

DILYS BARRATT (Maidenhead, Berkshire)

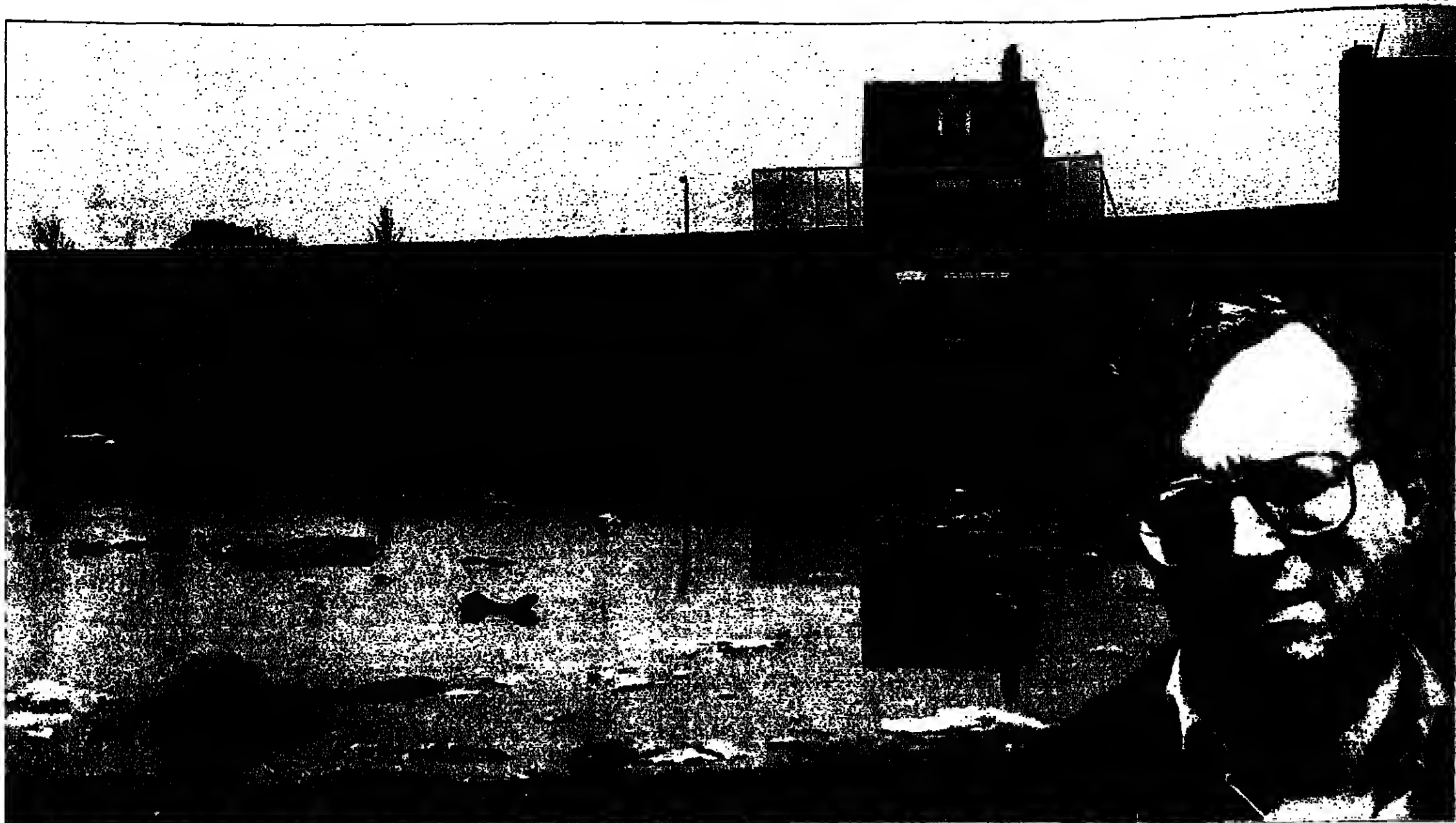
Sir: I sympathise with Mr Benford's feelings. The time taken for a first-class letter of normal size sent from my home in Northumberland to Westbury, Wiltshire was four days. The same applied in the reverse direction.

City-to-city first-class letters may be delivered the next day, but when it comes to rural, or semi-rural, areas - forget it!

J HEWITT (Ponteland, Northumberland)

Fisk in Ireland, Part 1

Robert Fisk, *The Independent's* award-winning war reporter, returns to Northern Ireland after more than 20 years to find that it has eerie parallels with the Middle East



Belfast's 'peace' line, as high and distressing as any of the Beirut variety. Inset: Robert Fisk, Middle East correspondent, who reported from Belfast in the Seventies. Main photograph: Stephen Davison/Paceemaker

Back to Belfast

Where was the border? All the way up from Dublin, the stations had been recognisably Victorian, with their stone booking offices and arched brick windows and lacy wooden roofs. Dundalk, the last station before the frontier, looked just like Lisburn, the last big station before Belfast. Indeed, they must have been designed by the same company, perhaps the very same architect, in the days before partition. But Dundalk had been identified in Irish as 'Dun Dealgán', while Lisburn carried no hint of its original Gaelic name.

The Middle East has sharpened my sense of the politics of names. In Hebrew, Jerusalem is 'Yerushalayim'. In Arabic, it is 'Al-Quds'. Belfast would so be 'Beal Feirste' if that art of its history had not been washed away. Ironically, it is a one kept to the left of the line that alerts passengers to the border, a medieval fortress very bit as forbidding as the Crusader castles that litter yria, Lebanon and what was once Palestine, the 12th century minding us of the frontiers of the 1920s.

How strange is the effect of crossing these invisible lines. On the other side of a field to the right, the cars bearing Irish

number plates with their little Irish EU signs had vanished, to be replaced by vehicles with a familiar yellow British registration. Across on the Newry road, an advertisement announced the best dry-cleaners in Ireland 'as seen on BBC'. And high up on a hillside above the railway embankment, an iron stockade contained the descendants of the armies of Elizabeth I, their swords replaced by radio aerials and anti-missile screens. Their presence reduced to this indefensible bit of the old Ireland.

The rain was beating against the windows of my carriage. The station signs now came in an odd, oblong typeface without capital letters, screwed on to iron grills.

I had forgotten the smell of Belfast, the cloak of invisible, wet smoke that wraps the city in winter. I had forgotten that despite its assumed Britishness, Northern Ireland boasted a Ruritanian currency of local fivers and £10 notes, each illustrated with the kind of rippling fields and cranes and tractors that I can find on the banknotes

of any Arab nation. And I had not remembered the distance – the hundreds of miles and light years – that separate Westminster from this avowedly British city.

In a province in which the Unionists are supposed to represent the Tories – which they don't – and in which the Labour party does not field a single candidate, the *Belfast Telegraph* was advertising an 'exclusive' interview with Tony Blair. 'There is not a lot of trust around now ...' he is saying. 'What is to be gained by one more death and one more bombing? The answer is nothing ... If violence stops and trust and confidence can be built, then I think Northern Ireland can have a great future ...'

'Can', 'Think'. It was lamentable. What will Tony Blair's approach to Northern Ireland be? 'Bugger all,' an old Protestant friend of mine from Derry replied, reading aloud another passage of Blairite wisdom in which the Labour leader declared that he was 'not going to dictate what the terms of that

future might be' although it would have to 'be based on consent and agreement and respect for the very different traditions which coexist in the province'.

'Bullshit,' my friend said. 'It will have to be based on British leadership and contempt for sectarianism, on a British prime minister with enough seats to ignore the Unionist party, and who'll tell the police to keep the rule of law and not cave in to Orangemen, and who'll stop stroking the IRA one day and calling them shit the next.'

I'd forgotten how little the British understood the Protestants and Catholics of Northern Ireland – and how well Northern Irelanders comprehend the weaknesses of the little meo at Westminster. Ask Protestants if they trust John Major and they will pronounce his name with the 'J' of John heavily and contemptuously aspirated, along with the good-natured smile of the strong who know how to deal with the pusillanimity of their enemies.

'We don't trust John Major,' Ian Paisley declared to me. 'He's made promises to us and he hasn't kept them.' And I noticed that the good reverend also grinned when he mentioned Major's name, like a hungry man contemplating lunch.

Or dinner, as Northern Irelanders call lunch – dinner being 'supper' in Belfast. Just as Britain is 'across the water'

and Dublin is 'in the south', the centre of the known world being Belfast – just as Beirut or Damascus or Jerusalem or Hebron or Gaza are to their inhabitants.

Belfast has now been dressed in its status as a semi-peaceful – or half-warlike – city: boutiques, new restaurants and clothing stores and bookshops, a revitalised (theatrical and arts life, and a new lower ground floor of the Europa Hotel that makes it look like the front of a Third Reich ministry.

'Don't you like the city now?' asked the lady who used to safeguard my bank account in Donegal Place in the days when I was a Belfast correspondent. 'People don't want to go back to the bad days.'

This surprised me. The 'bad days' are supposed to be back. But as David McKitterick, *The Independent's* Ireland correspondent, has put it, this is 'half war'. 'Quarter war,' I suggested to McKitterick – we have been old friends since the Seventies, when I worked in Belfast for *The Times*. David for *The Irish Times* – after he offered to drive me round west Belfast. There were no security checks in town, I said. No barriers. No soldiers. Where was the war?

McKitterick has a soft, devastating sense of humour. Like many in Northern Ireland, he smiles after he has made a joke, not before. This can be disturbing. When I asked where the war was, he was silent.

The RUC men and soldiers slid past the car window like an old film

'This is where Divis was – do you recognise these houses?' We had turned left off the Falls Road. Of course, I've driven round these Catholic homes many times. 'No, you haven't,' McKitterick said. 'They're all new.'

They were. Smart terraces and semi-detached houses – most built to the same dimensions as the shums they took the place of. The Housing Executive dutifully replacing the familiar with the familiar – had taken the place of the squalor that I remembered. But when we turned a corner, the old Belfast was there, two lonely RUC men in flak jackets with a line of British soldiers on both pavements, their rifle-sights caressing the contours of each house, the bright green and black camouflage making the old, cruel contrast with the grey estate. They slid past the car window like an old film, a television repeat of infinite weariness and meaning. McKitterick had made his point, but slid a cassette beneath the car radio.

An English voice, public school, vowels enunciated, was speaking slowly and deliberately over a two-way radio. 'Two dead bodies are being taken to Altnagelvin Hospital,' the voice said. The tape had been discovered by Channel 4 when its crew were investigating Bloody Sunday, the shooting dead of 13 civil rights demonstrators by members of the 1st Battalion, the Parachute Regiment in Derry in January 1972.

McKitterick let the cassette run on as we drove along the 'peace' line, as high and as distressing as any of the Beirut variety that lay along the

Lebanese front lines between 1975 and 1990. From the radio comes a high-pitched whine and a voice – another British army officer – saying: 'Photographers are taking pictures of a body in Chamberlain street.'

The whine continues on the tape. 'Helicopter,' McKitterick mutters. And I understand. The voices are coming from a helicopter high over the Rossville Flats on Bloody Sunday, as clear now – 25 years later – as they were on the day.

McKitterick turns into Cupar Way and stops beside the custom-made 'peace' line, 40ft high, green-painted, running as far as the eye can see, shameful and sinister. And when I wind down my window, I hear, high above us, the whine of a real-time helicopter. Several thousand feet up, it circles and recedes this slum state, photographing and re-photographing the wasteland and garbage and the vehicles on the road and, no doubt, our car too. And an odd thought occurs to me, that this tiny machine has been flying for 25 years, that its haunting mosquito whine has never left the skies of Northern Ireland, that if I lived here – rather than amid the heat and flies of the Middle East – I could believe that nothing had changed since Bloody Sunday.

Like the Lebanese, the people of Belfast long ago developed an exaggerated sense of their own tragedy. The Lebanese foreign minister insisted to me in 1983 that if Lebanon was not given peace, it would be 'the end of the known world'. Palestinians have been given to claim that their plight is worse than that of the Jews in the European Holocaust. In just such a way,

IRA prisoners in the Eighties would claim that Lough Keesh camp was 'worse than Belsen'. Only last month, the Northern Ireland Office was proposing to make a television advertisement suggesting that intimidation in Belfast could be compared to the persecution of Jews in pre-war Germany. Nobody must be allowed to place events in perspective.

In Ballymurphy, four young men in jeans watch our car suspiciously. 'Social workers,' McKitterick says, only glancing at me afterwards to see if I caught his irony.

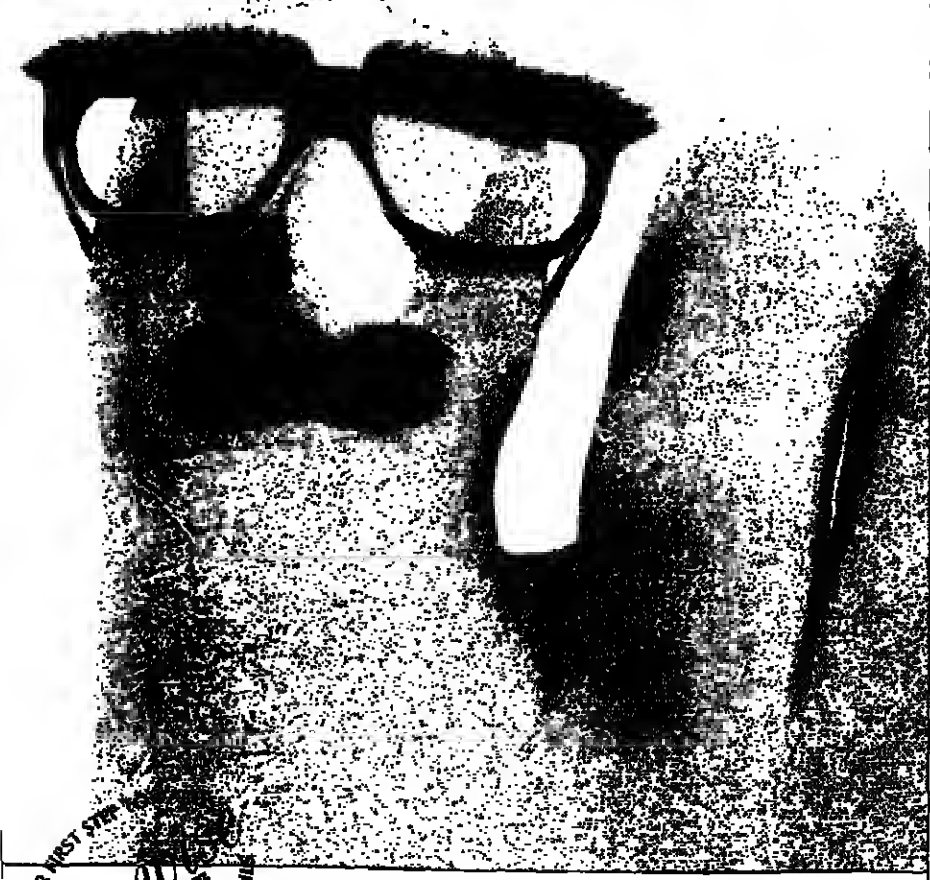
The walls were painfully familiar. 'Welcome to the Loyalist Heartland of Ulster', 'Live Free – Or Like a Freeman Die – Not Like a Fenian Slave', 'Shankill Road No Surrender'. Wasn't there an 'h' in Shankill, I ask innocently?

'No,' McKitterick replies. 'But there's not usually a comma in the middle of 'No Surrender'.' Then he smiles quietly to himself.

In Lebanon, the graffiti is more rhetorical, declarative. 'Nasser – light, brotherhood, unity,' it says down the road from my Beirut home. 'Support the resistance – crush Zionism.' The Palestinians used to have a poster which proclaimed to its warriors that 'we shall stand in the last trench against the Zionist death wagon', a remark which made up in enthusiasm what it lacked in passion. But in both countries, the real questions are the same. Who are these messengers for? What is the purpose of the wall paintings of the Irish famine and King Billy? To preach to the converted? To reduce the complex to the simplistic? To avoid argument? Or to instruct us that hatred and fear and anger and a sense of injustice have a greater integrity – and are buried deeper – than peace?

Tomorrow: Robert Fisk talks to Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley.

There's no disguising problem toenails



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FREEPHONE 0800 200 210

Every plucky underdog has his day

'The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but that's the way to bet', said Damon Runyon, thus reflecting the great truth that the favourite is not often passed in the last furlong by an outsider. The favourite usually wins, yes. On the other hand, that is not always enough to make him popular. It is the underdog that people want to win, the little guy that nobody fancies. There is nothing quite like seeing Holyfield dump Tyson on his backside, or Sri Lanka thrash the world at one-day cricket, or Wrexham beat Birmingham and go on to take the FA Cup. (The latter is just wishful thinking from a Wrexham supporter, and has not actually happened yet in this space-time continuum.)

But the underdog can only win for a while before things change. Once the underdog starts winning, he isn't going to be the underdog for long or quite so popular, or not in the same way. Tim Henman will never quite be the dark horse again, the brave little struggler – indeed, one day soon, Henman will be upset by an underdog, and my

goodness, what is this in Tuesday's paper? 'Henman beaten by unknown.' Henman, 17th in the world, put out of first round of the Dubai Open by the German Martin Sinner, 183rd in the world. A new underdog!

So the big guy can never be the underdog. The only way in which the big guy can ever achieve underdog status is by pretending to be, by rolling over on his back and looking temporarily helpless. Here is an interesting thought on the film *Independence Day* by Phil Raby, the excellent film critic of the *Bath Chronicle*.

'It (the film) fulfils all the necessary conditions of the way Americans see themselves: unprovoked attack from out of nowhere by vastly superior faceless forces and defeat staring them in the face. Then comes retaliation and, against all the odds, victory. It's strange how the most powerful nation on Earth needs to see itself as a plucky underdog when, for the most part, its foreign policy has consisted of crushing plucky underdogs, but self-delusion is a common phenomenon.'



Miles Kingston

Maybe it was for psychological reasons like this that McDonald's made the strange decision to take the McLibel two to court. Maybe McDonald's felt terribly, helplessly threatened by these two people handing out leaflets outside one of their London branches. Maybe McDonald's felt impelled to send in the lawyers to handle the two protesters in the same way that America used to feel impelled to send in military advisers to recalcitrant places, or to isolate them in

the same way America tries to isolate Fidel Castro (and thus help to make him the world's longest-surviving leader). Whatever the reason, McDonald's must now be regretting its decision to blast the underdogs, as it must have lost them a lot of friends. It certainly helped decide me over to go inside a McDonald's joint again, though in all honesty I cannot remember being a friend of McDonald's beforehand.

And it has all happened again this week with the news that the big boys in the whisky industry are trying to squash a tiny firm in the Isle of Man which is putting out 'Manx whisky'. As far as I can gather, they don't actually want the firm to disappear. They just want them to stop calling it whisky and start calling it Manx Magic or TT Thunder or something. Glen Kella Whiskey, as it is called, offends the mighty Scotch Whisky Association because it is not actually made on the Isle of Man – it is Scotch whisky bought in Scotland and redistilled to remove the colouring. You mustn't fiddle with whisky, says the SWA, or

it stops being whisky. What comes out of the cask after maturing is the real thing and shouldn't be fiddled with, as the bad boys of Glen Kella are doing.

Now, quite apart from the distasteful sight of the huge industry combining to squash one little Manxman, the big boys are on dodgy ground here, because THEY too fiddle with whisky after it has matured and left the cask.

I am not referring here to the stuff called blended whisky, the Bell's and Famous Grouse and Teacher's and all that, which is a mystery to everyone because it combines an unspecified amount of unnamed malt whisky with an unspecified amount of nameless grain spirit coming from no one knows where.

Nor am I referring to the way whisky is reduced in strength by the addition of water, which it is. No, I am referring to the fact that even the so-called real thing, single malt whisky, is also tampered with by the industry after it has left the cask.

More on this tomorrow, if I haven't been arrested by the whisky police.



Andrew Marr

Failure is
always
possible.
But what
we need in
Britain,
surely, is
more
diversity
and
experiment
— not less

question (which can have the fizz taken out of it by the removal of some Scottish MPs from Westminster) but the much harder question of whether or not a Scottish parliament can make itself useful. This is the real and so far unanswered challenge for Scottish politics, but it is one with relevance for other democracies, too.

Who needs another pile of bloody politicians, sticking their car in, when we already pay enough? That is the big question, what we might call the West European question, which should resonate everywhere. Scottish voters, like other voters, are unlikely to call for much higher taxes on themselves. Given that, what real difference could an Edinburgh parliament make?

Intellectually disabled by chronic optimism, I still think the answer, for creative and ambitious politicians, is—a lot. It could show how a modern legislature might free itself of Westminster's Gothic self-importance, and reconnect with sceptical citizens. It could help to rebuild the striking Scottishness of Scottish education, a head-headed, philosophical style of learning that has been almost—but not quite—lost. This would be done not by barring English students, but by reforming the curriculum, and management of schools and universities.

It could finally tackle Highland land reform. It might, perhaps, go further towards environmental politics than the south is ready to. It could create a proper lobby for Scottish interests in Brussels. It could ...

ment will consist of beer-slobbering, expense-fiddling third-raters who begin by losing the public's attention, and then throw away its support. But failure is possible for all parliaments everywhere. The interesting question isn't the old, nationalist one of which tribe or territory is covered by which boxful of politicians, but, rather, whether they have the wit and programme to make a difference.

And what we need in Britain, surely, is more diversity and experiment, not less. Scottish charities and public bodies, advocates and educationists, investment houses and ministers are all subtly different in their attitudes and instincts from their rivals in London. Who would wish it otherwise? And we need comparison and competition in political attitudes and political processes as well as in commerce.

We are alive in a multi-ethnic, interwoven country afloat in a similar sort of world. The London-based *Independent* is part-owned by Irishmen and Spaniards, and edited by a Scot, while *The Scotsman* is owned, and now edited, by the English.

Chippiness should be kept for the sports arenas and the back bar. What matters is what is done, and how well — not, any longer, who does it. If a Scottish parliament works, it will be a source of inspiration and enlightenment for English democrats. If it doesn't, it will be an equally useful and relatively painless lesson for them.

So, my English friends, democrats all - please relax.

Life or death? We must all decide

Cloaked in its usual secrecy, last week the Medicines Control Agency made an important decision, yet to be announced. They agreed to license a new drug called Aricept, the first to make any improvement in the mental state of Alzheimer's patients. Now stand back and await the stampede.

What are health authorities to do? There are some 650,000 patients with dementia. (Two thirds of them have Alzheimer's, but identifying which ones have it is difficult.) The drug will cost £100 a month per patient. In April, when it will probably become available, around half a million patients — or their carers — will head straight for their GPs to ask for the only treatment for this disease that has been proven to do any good at all.

Already the word is spreading. When I first called the Alzheimer's Society an over-enthusiastic worker told me that the new drug could make a 30 per cent improvement in the brain function of many sufferers. Later, their executive director was more circumspect. Certainly there are improvements for some, he agreed, but better cognitive ability in remembering numbers in laboratory tests does not necessarily translate into people being able to find their way to the lavatory.

However, he had heard of



Polly Toynbee

If every treatment is a question of cost, the NHS will become a US-style safety net for the very poor.

previously helpless patients taking part in the drug trials who had suddenly been able to write a shopping list, then go down to the shop and ask for everything on it. It will only take a few stories like that to make desperate carers frantic to get their hands on the drug.

So if half a million people demand the drug, it will cost some £600,000. How is the NHS to decide who gets it, and at what opportunity cost to other patients?

Ask any politician and they run a mile. Rationing? What rationing? I see no rationing. "Priority setting," perhaps, but the word "rationing" does not cross their lips. The official line is that each health authority must decide how to spend their allocated funds according to local needs — as if these diseases were local. Never has the cause of devolution been so passionately espoused as by our Pontius Pilate health ministers over the past few years.

Aricept helps the memory of those in the early and middle stages of Alzheimer's, but not the painful process of disintegration of the personality. The drug may not make much difference to the amount of care they need, so it may not save care costs. Indeed, it could prolong the life of some and if it were mistakenly prescribed to the already seriously affected, it could prolong their misery. But assuming only the

There has been a spate of nostalgic movie musicals around, but instead of being uplifting, which you might expect of any musical, let alone offerings that evoke the past, they are mostly rather nasty. Only one, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, is a must-watch. Wouldn't you know it? It's French. And it's not merely about the past, it's old (1964). Its director, Jacques Demy, made no bones from the start: his film was to be deliberately, perhaps even kitschily, enchanting. It was to recapture the romantic exhilaration of a seaside adolescence.

The other films, new and newish, not merely lack charm, but talk about the pest for an age and perhaps a society which assumes that charm must be weak-minded, charmingism and phoney. Somewhere between musicals such as *South Pacific* or *West Side Story* and now, we lost the ability to see that toughness and tenderness can flourish without descending into violence or sentimentality. And perhaps we also put in peril the means of living happily together. Even the sensually libidinal film censor James Ferman has been so far from the blood and sees it as a problem unique in the cinema's history, and a threat to our well-being. It is unlikely that he was thinking of musicals when he considered the depraving effects of the medium.

But he might have. Take, for instance, the brilliant, new recruit, Altmán, film *Kansas City*, it is his *Short Cuts* that would make one expect, *noir* and – as the cliché has it – closely observed. Altmán's story-telling (rich dolehead kidnapped by flaky incompetent) is gripping and gives him lots of opportunities for vignettes of real insight. The result is a musical because, throughout the action, jazz musicians are playing themselves playing the classics of the Thirties, and because it is clear from the start that the idea of a music-mad town is what motivates the enterprise. All in all it is a triumph of style and intelligence, with the grip of a Raymond Chandler. Except that at one point the film turns into a style exercise, a bit of savagery and improbability. I didn't believe a beating like that would have taken place in the circumstances, and even if it had, we didn't need to be shown

The Who's album *Quadrophenia*, one of the best sustained works by any rock band, was recorded in 1973 and made into a film in 1979. The movie was made in the punk era, when nastiness was even more chic than usual among film-makers seeking to make a mark. The

by Richard D North



Pretty but profound: Catherine Deneuve in Derry's 'Umbrellas of Cherbourg'

Directors seem to have lost the ability to make films that are both charming and tough-minded, yet do not descend into violence

film, though not the previous score, dwells on the tribal confrontations between Mods and Rockers on Brighton beach in

at the early Sixties. So far as I can gather, these were more like the ritual displays of mating birds than real war, but that wouldn't do for the film-makers. Franc Roddam, the director, portrays the Mods as nasty pieces of work, and depicts what were probably occasional serious incidents as routine.

In the late Seventies, the Who put out an album called *The Kids Are Alright*, and I wore one of the badges advertising it. The odd thing is that the kids more or less are and were all right, but not as portrayed by the Who's film. In any case their being all right is not much enhanced by a constant diet of tricked-up nastiness such as *Quadrophobia*. Young people seeing the film will think that contrived unpleasantness is

the natural way of their grand-
fathers (Mods have become
that generation) and may as
well not be eschewed now.

Evita is closer to the old model of musical than the others, simply because it was a fully-fledged stage show before being got up in celluloid. It can claim to be romantic, though of course it romanticises a tricky era of history rather than the mating game. The music in *Evita* is surprisingly engaging. The songs are mostly good, including Madonna's. And yet the film is a rather nasty piece of work. Leave aside that it celebrates a dictator's wife, more to the point is that one is given very little reason for liking anyone in the piece, except perhaps the dictator himself, since he does at least seem to care for his subjects. The film's disjunction between soaring love songs (and even elegiac patriotic songs) and the trou-

ling issue of just how much of a frost Evita really was. It doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone that it was necessary to make it clear where the film thought the truth might lie, and whether it redeems or condemns Eva Peron. It would have helped if the film had implied that its point of view is that such things don't matter, and that what does matter is to portray how interesting Evita is. But she isn't. On this account: Evita is not much more than a wall of sound and some frocks. (By the way, this is pretty obviously a "chick" movie: let's have no nonsense about

No 4

Alan Parker is a wonderfully talented director, but his listlessness here should be no surprise: *The Commitments*, rather like the Who's *Quadrophenia*, seemed to suppose that no working-class young people could be depicted without plenty of hitting going on. It's as though only the list conveyed authenticity.

There is no hitting at all in *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, set in the late Fifties or very early Sixties. The film is instead magical. Never since *Salad Days* or *The Breathless*—which belong to the Fifties, have the British produced a musical hall so romantic. *Salad Days* was, of course, satirical (it reminds one mostly of the style of the pocket cartoons of Osbert Lancaster, with shades of John Minton's drawings of sunny and youthful boys and girls), and was fresh as a springtime. *Umbrellas* is equally fresh, but not satirical. It is set in the real Cherbourg, and in a real garage. A mechanic falls in love with a girl in a real shop. The pettiness of her mother's social code, and her ambition for her daughter, ensure that their romance fails. But then you notice that the colours of this world are mostly pastel, and mostly clash.

The current showings demand to be seen because Demy's foresight has meant that an exquisite restoration of the priors has been possible. There is a sort of *Absolutely Fabulous* passion for the just slightly sub-fluorescent. This colouring seems designed to express the idea of people surfing giddy emotions: they are literally a rosy view of youthful passion. But the young of *Cherbourg* face reality too. The film's themes are death, separation and disappointment.

Everybody ends up happy enough but with second-class - or at any rate second-hand - love. It is a plot of microscopic proportions but nice symmetries and the outcome is neither saccharine nor shallow. While the film is sweet, it is not sentimental. It is in fact a deep piece of work, and certainly deeper about human, and especially youthful, motivation than *Evie* and the rest. It is a film for the modern young, to enjoy and understand pleasure. Above all it is for those rare moderns: people who are frightened of the modern fashion for aggression and rudecess.

'Umbrellas of Cherbourg' is on release in art houses around the country.

Nº 47

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Birdsong.

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W

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STERLING		DOLLAR			D-MARK	
Country	Spot	1 month	3 months	Spot	1 month	3 months
US	1649	16 1/2	16 1/2	1000	-	0580
Canada	2548	54-28	54-25	125 1/4	24-23	75-73
Germany	2262	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
France	2267	70-68	69-70	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Italy	2267	70-68	69-70	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Japan	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
SDI	1404	21-8	21-8	1045	15-47	149-147
Belgium	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Spain	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Netherlands	3062	82-84	82-85	187 1/2	37-37	92-90
Sweden	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Switzerland	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
UK	1404	21-8	21-8	1045	15-47	149-147
Portugal	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Denmark	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Finland	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Norway	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Australia	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
New Zealand	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
South Africa	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87
Singapore	2267	69-81	69-83	167 1/2	32-33	80-87

Country	Starling	Dollar	Country	Starling	Dollar
Angola	16/08	01889	Nigeria	12/37	03580
Argentina	12/29	17602	Oman	06/35	03760
Australia	12/05	1047	Pakistan	06/38	1390
Brazil	8/25	1047	Peru	13/08	24 170
Canada	15/07	34/08	Portugal	16/78	30750
Chile	13/01	42/43	Spain	27/25	1840
Colombia	26/70	94/03	Sweden	07/25	16400
Costa Rica	20/10	1047	Switzerland	27/30	27500
Cuba	16/10	33/850	Taiwan	42/75	24850
India	16/10	33/850	UAE	07/10	36750
Japan	04/78	02/08			

Units: Forward rates quoted in dollars to the dollar as an approximate guide. Rates shown above are quoted in dollars to the dollar as an approximate guide. Rates shown above are quoted in dollars to the dollar as an approximate guide.

E Boys	E Boys	E Boys	
Australia (Australia)	8,940	New Zealand (Chadwick)	2,388
Belgium (Belgium)	2,847	Norway (Kjorset)	10,392
Canada (Canada)	9,630	Paraguay (Kjorset)	263,356
France (France)	54,900	Spain (Francis)	222,630
Germany (Germany)	2,830	Sweden (Kjorset)	2,700
Italy (Italy)	0,700	Switzerland (Francis)	2,100
Denmark (Kjorset)	0,180	United States	94,000,000
Finland (Chadwick)	2,000	United States (Chadwick)	1,600
Japan (Japan)	2,870		

UK Banks	80%	Germany Discount	25%	US Prices	67%	Japan Discount	0.5%
Prime		London	45%	Discount	30%	Buys	
Intervention	3%	Cash		Real Funds	52%	Discount	25%
Discount		Prime	41%	Spain		Central	30%
Multi-lateral	2%	Discount	36%	10-Day Euro	60%	Realized	
Advance	25%	Discount	32%	Sweden		Discount	10%
				Swiss (Awd)	4%	Lombard	42%

Country	5 yr	Yield %	10 yr	yield %	Country	5 yr	Yield %	10 yr	yield %
UK	70%	6.8%	75%	7.2	Netherlands	87%	4.37	90%	3.57
US	8.2%	8%	85%	6.4	Spain	79%	5.87	73%	6.75
Japan	85%	1.65	28%	2.34	Italy	77%	8.52	73%	7.21
Australia	100%	7.1	57%	7.34	Belgium	80%	4.35	82%	5.84
Germany	30%	4.56	61%	5.18	Sweden	73%	5.41	85%	5.82
France	53%	4.3	54%	5.6	EU Govt	80%	5.18	55%	5.18

	O'Night	3 Day	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	1 Year
Interbank	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4
Banking CDs	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4
Local Authority Depts	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4
Discount Market Depts	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4
Treasury Bills (Buy)	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4
Dollar CDs	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4
EDU Locked Dep	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4	5 1/4

Contract	Settlement price	High/Low	End/Cross traded	Open Interest
Germany Govt Bond	(Mar 92)	125-10	125-10	84,920
Italy Govt Bond	(Mar 92)	123-05	123-02	23,316
Italian Bond	(Mar 92)	120-02	121-38	12,320
Spain Govt Bond	(Mar 92)	121-05	121-05	10,550
3-Month Swtling	(Jun 92)	92-11	92-12	2,222
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-07	92-08	7,524
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-08	92-08	12,448
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-08	92-08	17,667
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-07	92-07	10,857
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-07	92-04	2,927
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-05	92-05	7,761
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-05	92-05	3,054
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-05	92-05	6,413
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-05	92-05	2,074
3-Month Eurodollar	(Jun 92)	92-05	92-05	3,221
FTSE 100	(Mar 92)	4,501-00	4,501-00	328
FTSE 100	(Mar 92)	4,501-00	4,501-00	3,678

Series	4350	4360	4350	4400	Call/Put Total/vols
Feb	77/74	40/29	15/60	4/109	..
Mar	102/51	72/72	47/87	28/129	..
Apr	129/79	98/97	74/123	51/151	..
May	152/85	120/112	94/106	71/182	..

INDUSTRIAL METALS - Loxwood Metal Exchange						
Item	Unit	5/18	Volume	Line	Stocks	chg
Aluminum 9003-265	5298.00	9091	95896		3638	
Aluminum 9004	9403.00	8958	970	2280		
Aluminum 9005	9229.00	9003		7903		2360
Lead	6385.00	84600	1033	10000		75
Steel	7700.00	779070	1089	1000		70
Iron	3600.00	3770	2280	1000		70
Zinc	1545-85	1620-76	22807	69055		163

Settlement Dates: 5/18/82
 5/18/82 5/18/82 5/18/82 5/18/82

Source: Loxwood & Co. Inc. 7/11/87

PRECIOUS METALS									
Item	Unit	C	Colm	S	C	S			
Plat 999.5	554.25	2560	300	300	29	Argentine	940.00	200.00	
Palladium	1022.5	3025	318.75	cc	10	104	500	497.5	
Gold	438.00	90.00	31.25	cc	52	56	Moine	500.00	100.00

[illegible]

SPK	5.30pm	*chg	Yr ago	SPK	close	*chg	6pm	Spot CF Month	West Europe
Mar	2175	+0.35		Feb	192.50	+4.25	Mar	22.40	Pure Unmilled
Apr	2171	+0.30		Mar	192.75	+1.50	Apr	22.45	Naphta
May	2043	+0.38		Apr	193.00	+1.75	May	21.85	EC Gasoil
Vol	30581		Index	2137	Vol	15790	Jun	21.80	Heavy Fuel Oil

Value added	1970-76	1976-80	1980-84	1984-88	1988-92	1992-96	1996-00
Index	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Manufacturing	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Services	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Construction	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Government	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Nonprofit	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Education	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Health	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Arts	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Recreation	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Religion	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Other	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, *Real Gross Domestic Product*, Washington, D.C., 2000.

[illegible]

ex dividend
exit charge applies
when units are sold
formerly 'offer'
formerly 'bid'
Non SIS recognised funds

business & city

Business news desk: tel 0171-293 2636 fax 0171-293 2098
BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

Unilever sells £5bn chemical division

Disposal of interests will wipe out £1.7bn debt and provide war chest

Nigel Cope

Niall FitzGerald, the new chairman of Unilever, signalled a new era for the sprawling consumer goods conglomerate yesterday with a surprise decision to put its speciality chemicals division up for sale in a move that could raise £5bn.

The proceeds will wipe out Unilever's £1.7bn of debts and leave Mr FitzGerald with a huge war chest as he seeks to redefine Unilever as a more focused fast-moving consumer goods company similar to rivals Nestlé, Procter & Gamble and Campbell's.

Mr FitzGerald, who took over as chairman in September, said the decision was part of a plan to "de-clutter" the Unilever portfolio and concentrate on key brands which include Persil detergents, Flora margarine and ice-creams such as the Magnum and Solero.

Though the chemicals division is highly profitable, Mr FitzGerald said that 16 per cent of the business was "underperforming" and that disposal in the foods division would follow.

Unilever's shares put on 78.5p to £14.71p as City analysts welcomed the shake-up. Shares in Reckitt & Colman and Cadbury Schweppes also rose as industry experts said a deal in Europe or North America was most likely.

As analysts pondered a possible re-rating of Unilever's shares, they said the bold move represented a re-invention of a company which in the past has been criticised for being cumbersome and bureaucratic.

"What we are looking at is a

fundamental re-evaluation of Unilever's business," one analyst said. "They are not selling the crown jewels, they are saying let's define ourselves not by our history but by what we are good at."

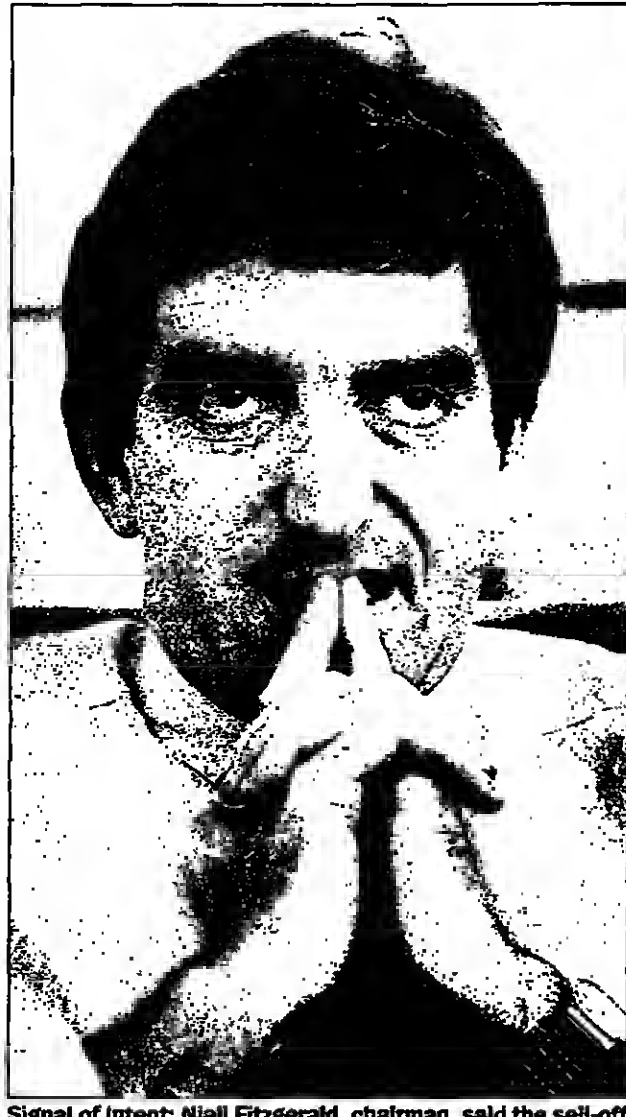
Announcing the sell-off plan Mr FitzGerald said: "This intention is a clear demonstration of our commitment to focus our attention on the fast-moving consumer product and service category and related businesses in which we excel and in which we are determined to lead the world."

He said the decision to exit speciality chemicals had not been easy. "It's a strategic decision to do with where we want to be in the future. We either had to double the size of the [speciality chemicals] business or get out."

Mr FitzGerald said a trade sale was more likely than a flotation. Though he did not rule out returning cash to shareholders he expressed more interest in developing Unilever's interests in emerging markets such as China, South-east Asia, south Latin America and eastern Europe where Unilever is enjoying rapid growth.

The businesses up for sale have combined turnover of £3bn and staff of 15,800 in 35 countries. Last year they recorded combined profits of £415m. The highest price tags are likely to be attached to the National Starch and Chemical Company, which produces industrial adhesives, resins and specialty starches, and Quest International, a leading fragrance company with interests in food flavour and ingredients.

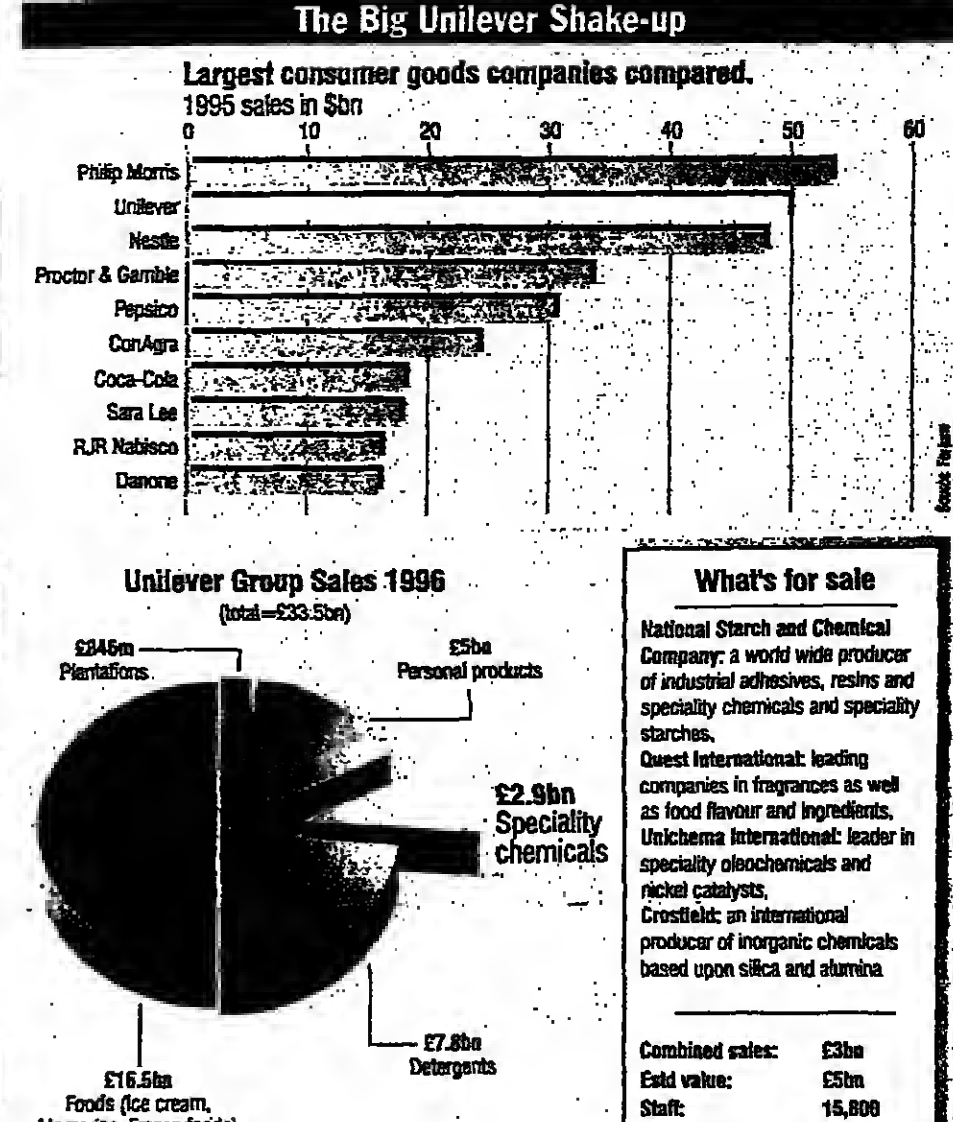
Analysts said the sale of these



Signal of intent: Niall FitzGerald, chairman, said the sell-off plan meant commitment in consumer products and services

two "collectors' items" was likely to spark an auction. Possible buyers for National Starch include Heoelke, du Pont and Associated British Foods. Companies such as IFF and Roche

would be interested in Quest. Also up for sale is Unichema International, an oil and fats business that makes ingredients for soaps, skincare products and shampoos, and Crosfield, a pro-



ducer of inorganic chemicals for use in the petroleum and plastics industries.

The shake-up came as Mr FitzGerald announced a 15 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to

£2.6bn for the year to the end of 1996. The figures were boosted by £325m of exceptional items of which £100m related to the integration of the Helene Curtis haircare division and

the Diversy industrial cleaning products business. Group sales were up 6 per cent at £33.5bn. The final dividend was 32.05p.

Comment, page 17

South West Trains fined over cancelled services

Michael Harrison

Stagecoach, the bus and rail operator, is to be fined over the train crew shortages that have forced its South West Trains division to cancel commuter services into London's Waterloo station.

A spokesman for the Franchising Director, John O'Brien, said yesterday that financial penalties would be levied on South West Trains under the performance regime agreed when it was awarded the seven-year franchise a year ago.

The cancellations are a severe embarrassment for Stagecoach, which took over the franchise promising an improved service, better trains and more customer information.

The company, headed by Brian Souter, has served notice that it intends to expand aggressively from the bus industry into trains. But in recent days it has lost out in the bidding for two high-profile franchises - the West Coast Mainline and ScotRail.

South West Trains commercial director, Peter Cotton, is to be quizzed about the cancellations at a meeting with a rail users' committee tomorrow evening. A spokeswoman for the London Regional Passengers Committee said: "We are concerned about what is happening and so are our passengers. We have had an influx of complaints and want to hear some answers."

The root cause of the problem is a redundancy programme introduced last month which resulted in 70 of South West Trains' 750 drivers taking voluntary severance. A spokeswoman insisted that although the company still had more drivers than it needed, it had been forced to cancel services because a number of train crews had been sent on retraining courses to cope with new routes and rostering arrangements.

South West Trains is one of the busiest commuter railways in Europe, operating services between London, Southampton, Weymouth and Exeter as well as suburban services to the west and south of London. It transports 300,000 passengers a day. Among the trains that have been cancelled are mainline services to Reading and peak-time commuter services.

The spokeswoman said that it had only cancelled an average of 14 services out of the 1,500 it runs every weekday but she conceded that most of these were at peak times and that it was causing inconvenience to passengers.

"We are not complacent about the cancellations and we are working hard with Aslef, the train drivers' union, to rectify the problems," she added.

Stagecoach was awarded the franchise in February last year after agreeing to operate the service with a subsidy falling from £54.7m in the first year to £40.3m in year seven. This compares with the £35.4m subsidy British Rail was budgeted to receive in 1995-96.

The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising said that it had been in contact with South West Trains and had made it plain that it expected the problems to be rectified as a matter of urgency. "It is not our job to run their business but we do have unlimited powers to penalise rail operators who fail to deliver," a spokesman added.

Under the performance regime, Opra can penalise operators on a monthly basis if they fail to meet agreed service levels. The system is weighted so that penalties are higher if trains are cancelled at peak times.

Comment, page 17

MMC referral deals blow to Sears' ambition

Nigel Cope

Sears' restructuring plans ran into fresh problems yesterday when the Government said it would be referring Littlewoods' proposed acquisition of the Freemans mail order business to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

The referral of the £395m deal is a severe blow to Liam Strong, the beleaguered Sears chief executive, who had hoped to use the proceeds from the sale to return up to £410m to

shareholders. The MMC is due to report on the deal by 9 June causing a delay in Sears' plans for a special dividend.

Mr Strong had asked Sears' increasingly frustrated investors to give him until the summer to show the group was turning the corner.

Sears said it remained committed to the disposal of Freemans to Littlewoods. However, the MMC's decision means the contract for the sale signed last month will lapse.

Beleaguered: Liam Strong under renewed pressure

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Davies softens stance over rates increase

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

The deputy governor of the Bank of England yesterday repeated its call for an increase in interest rates. But, in a speech just ahead of the publication of its quarterly Inflation Report today, Howard Davies struck a noticeably softer note than a recent comment from the Bank.

Mr Davies echoed recent statements that a rise in interest rates would be desirable.

"We are not entirely persuaded that on current interest rates we are on track to meet the Government's inflation target of 2.5 per cent over the next two years, which is the result we have been given," he said.

However, he added: "I should say the rise in rates we think necessary to meet the target is modest. We have been talking about a quarter per cent in the short term, with perhaps a little more later in the year."

The economy's recovery had been steadier and with lower in-

flation than was typical, he said. The gap between the Bank and the Chancellor on interest rates was small. "We are talking about differences of a quarter of a per cent."

In a speech to a Housing Corporation conference, Mr Davies warned that the Bank remained on the alert for any signs of a housing boom. A continuing "robust rise" would be a matter for concern, although he added that house prices remained low relative to earnings, and could rise a little while re-

maining consistent with the Government's inflation target. "What we need to watch carefully, though, is any sign that the price acceleration is taking us into the kind of heady territory we explored in the late 1980s which, in retrospect, we know to have been an experience which was bound to end in tears and did," Mr Davies said.

He also predicted that the private sector would not be able to meet all of the extra demand for housing in the next 20 years. Planned cuts in public expen-

iture meant the short-term prospects for social housing were not bright. Housebuilding by housing associations was forecast to decline.

But referring to Department of Environment predictions that the number of households would increase by 4.4 million during the next two decades, mainly in the form of one-person units, he argued that the housing market would need to become more flexible, with a greater variety of types of tenure and sources of funding.

Sumitomo bid rumours surround Lehman Bros

David Osborne
New York

The future of Lehman Brothers, the American investment bank with a significant presence in London, is again under the microscope amid a swirl of rumours that it could be the subject of a buyout bid by Japan's Sumitomo Bank.

Lehman, which does not have a large securities retail network following its separation from Shearson in 1990, is one among several US financial houses being viewed as likely players in a new wave of consolidation on Wall Street in the wake of the Morgan Stanley-Dean Witter merger of last week.

Sources inside the bank yesterday said they had no knowledge of an approach by Sumitomo. "I have been hearing a lot about Hong Kong Shanghai and the really hot one for a while was Bankers Trust," one insider remarked. "If it were Sumitomo, I would be really surprised."

There is a consensus that

Lehman, which has seen its stock value double since it was spun off by American Express in 1992, is an attractive target for firms, including banks, seeking new partners. Banks have had the path cleared toward the purchase of investment firms by the recent easing of the 1933 Glass-Steagall Act which placed barriers between them and brokerages.

Other possible targets regularly cited include Bear Stearns, the Prudential Securities division of Prudential Insurance Co, Paine Webber and regional US firms like A G Edwards and Alex Brown of Baltimore.

If Lehman is anxious to remain independent, however, it could equally attempt to move first in an acquisition of its own. A search for a partner with a strong securities retail capability could lead it to Paine Webber.

Paine Webber shares were driven up last week by rumours that it, and not Dean Witter, would be the target of Morgan Stanley's appetite.

Expectations of further consolidations were fuelled by sharp rises in the shares of many Wall Street firms immediately after the Morgan Stanley-Dean Witter announcement.

However, Scott Pardee, a senior adviser with Yamichi International, voiced doubts yesterday that foreign banks, including Sumitomo, could easily overcome regulatory concerns in Washington.

"I think this is going to be US banks looking at each other," he said. "Cross-border and cross-industry acquisitions could quickly run into questions with the regulators and I think it would be very difficult."

Ironically, the history of Lehman Brothers, and in particular its unhappy pairing with Shearson in the 1980s, offers one cautionary tale about the limits of coupling traditional investment banking services with a strong retail capacity. Shearson was meant to provide Lehman with a strong retail dimension, but the two firms never fully melded.

BP 'self-help' yields record £2.6bn profit

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Petroleum yesterday attributed a 30 per cent increase in its underlying annual profits to a record £2.6bn to the group's so-called "self-help" drive to cut costs, rather than the unexpected surge in oil prices.

However the results failed to grab the enthusiasm of investors, who had expected a stronger increase in the dividend payout in the last three months of 1996. The dividend rose by 0.25p to 5.25p compared with the previous quarter.

BP shares were marked down sharply, ending 27p lower at 694p. Its annual dividend increased by 23 per cent to 19.5p.

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Comment, page 17

Mr Browne said two-thirds of BP's profits last year had been achieved through these cost savings, with the remaining third from the boost to oil prices.

Last autumn the price of Brent crude briefly went through the \$25 barrier for the first time since the 1990 Gulf war. In the last quarter of 1996 BP's average oil selling price was \$23.1, up from \$17 during the same period in 1995.

However, Sir David Simon, BP chairman, was quick to dampen speculation of another "30 per cent year" in 1997. He said: "The board fully recognises you can't continue to grow at those sort of levels... the board doesn't expect that to be repeated every year."

The oil price boost helped profits from oil exploration to rise by 41 per cent to £814m in the last quarter of last year. Quarterly earnings from refining and marketing improved slightly to £163m, as profit margins recovered following last year's petrol price wars.

Investment column, page 19

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Vol (M)	Yield (%)		
FTSE 100	4304.30	-3.40	-0.1	4307.80	3632.30	3.61			
FTSE 250	4586.60	-10.10	-0.2	4616.00	4015.30	3.37			
FTSE 350	2125.80	-2.30	-0.1	2128.10	1916.60	3.58			
FTSE SmallCap	2326.56	+0.27	+0.0	2326.58	1954.06	2.93			
FTSE All-Share	2098.52	-2.04	-0.1	2100.56	1791.95	3.51			
New York	5824.25	+17.71	+0.3	5883.90	5032.94	1.95			
Tokyo	closed			22686.80	17303.85	0.901			
Hong Kong	13484.21	-189.33	-1.4	13668.24	10204.87	3.121			
Frankfurt	3187.58	+3.22	+0.1	3187.58	2253.36	1.481			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling			UK medium gilt			US long bond			
Index	1 Month	1 Year	Index	1 Month	1 Year	Index	1 Month	1 Year	10 Year
UK	6.12	6.68	7.13	7.69	7.21	7.87			
US	5.53	5.75	6.41	6.80	6.70	6.05			
Japan	0.38	0.43				2.98			
Germany	3.08	3.03	5.58	6.14	6.40				

Source: Reuters

CURRENCIES									
£/\$			£/DM			£/¥			
Index	Yesterday	Change	Index	Yesterday	Change	Index	Yesterday	Change	Year Ago
£/\$	1.6334	+0.008	1.5320	£/\$	0.6122	-0.008	0.6327		
\$/DM	1.6425	+1.21c	1.5305	\$/DM	0.6130	-0.02c	0.6534		
DM/\$	2.7056	-0.004	2.2833	DM/\$	1.6588	-1.57c	1.4774		
¥/\$	200.631	-171.74	163.865	¥/\$	122.830	-17.82c	108.962		
£/¥	97.0	-0.2	84.1	£/¥	102.7	up	99.2		

Source: Reuters

German borrowing fears boost sterling

The pound rose by more than three pence against the mark yesterday, as the markets reacted to rumours that German borrowing will be much higher than the 2.9 per cent of GDP that the government is predicting, writes Yvette Cooper.

Closing at DM 2.7458, sterling is at its highest level against the mark since late 1992 and just below the DM2.78 level at which the pound left the exchange rate mechanism.

Traders have taken several days to respond fully to the abysmal German unemploy-

ment figures released last Thursday. Although analysts were quick to sound the alarm when unemployment statistics proved higher than expected last week, the markets are still adjusting to the idea that the German economy is, even weaker than it had previously thought.

Rumours yesterday that German officials were revising upwards their predictions for government borrowing to push the mark down in relation to the pound were denied by the Finance Ministry.

Comment, page 17

COMMENT

Gover in o for m

Chris Godsmark

IN BRIEF

Three Arthur Andersen parties...
The cable industry will be awarded...
The cable industry will be awarded...

Spanish Am...
The cable industry will be awarded...
The cable industry will be awarded...

Allied Irish Banks...
The cable industry will be awarded...
The cable industry will be awarded...

LG Securities International...
The cable industry will be awarded...
The cable industry will be awarded...

Cable more than doubled...
The cable industry will be awarded...
The cable industry will be awarded...

FitzGerald's flotilla plots a hazardous course



COMMENT
If Unilever does manage to reorient itself away from tired old, slow-growth Europe to the dynamic developing economies, we will see the emergence of a quite different sort of company

Niall FitzGerald, Unilever's recently appointed chairman, likes to depict his company not as the giant oil tanker it is often described as – difficult to turn – but rather as a flotilla of nimble frigates all sailing in the same direction with a consistent set of battle orders. For the time being that analogy – intended to convey the impression of a hard-hitting, fast, flexible and entrepreneurial machine – may owe more to wishful thinking than reality. As the world's second largest consumer products company, Unilever is always going to find it hard to deliver anything other than pedestrian, OECD-average growth.

But that's not for lack of trying, and certainly Unilever seems at the moment to be making all the right noises. The flotilla is being firmly set on a course away from the stodgy, low-growth economies of Europe and the US and towards the double-digit growth opportunities of emerging markets. Furthermore a quite substantial part of the flotilla, specialty chemicals, is to be separated and sold. In itself, there's nothing particularly new in this. Unilever has been weeding out and selling off poorly performing businesses for years. Disposals over the past 10 years amount to £3.5bn of sales.

The point about Unilever's chemical businesses, however, is they are not poorly performing. In fact they are very much in demand among those at the cutting edge of consolidation in these industries. These are very significant businesses, accounting

for some 10 per cent of total group sales, worth perhaps upwards of £5bn. Mr FitzGerald's phone has barely stopped ringing since the "for sale" sign was hoisted yesterday morning. This is therefore quite a departure from the run-of-the-mill, ongoing disposal programme.

So what's the point of it? Unilever was faced with a choice. To leave these businesses alone would merely have been to watch their value erode. Unilever either had to commit very substantial extra investment to make them bigger, or it had to sell. Given that some of the businesses were finding they were disadvantaged by the Unilever link (Unilever competitors don't on the whole like dealing with Unilever companies), Mr FitzGerald has opted for the latter.

All very logical but the strategy is not without its risks. The difficulty is going to be in finding a replacement for these businesses which is as high-margin. Like many big companies these days, Mr FitzGerald believes the answers lie in the emerging markets of the Far East, Latin America, India and China. Today these markets account for less than 30 per cent of group sales. He aims to push that above 50 per cent over the next 10 years. That in itself would seem to rule out a big consumer products acquisition in the developed world.

But how else other than through acquisition can Unilever usefully apply all that money? Investing in organic growth, even in emerging markets, is a path fraught with dif-

ficulties and pitfalls. But let's give Mr FitzGerald the benefit of the doubt. If Unilever does manage to reorient itself away from tired old, slow-growth Europe to the dynamic developing economies, we will see the emergence of a quite different sort of company – one which really does justify the description of a flotilla of fast moving frigates.

Trouble in store for rail franchises

Perhaps it was just bad timing that on the very day the Government completed the sale of the last remaining passenger train franchise, the first one it disposed of was running into a spot of bother with its regulator. It is hard, however, to avoid the suspicion that the incident baste with which the 25 franchises have been sold off is stirring up trouble. Last week we had the spectacle of no less than four franchises being knocked out in one day. Anyone would think there was an election on the way.

To describe the franchising process as a "sale" is actually misleading. In the majority of cases the only cash that has changed hands has flowed in the direction of the successful bidders, who won the franchises on the basis of how little subsidy they would accept. This appears to have been Stagecoach's undoing when it ran the slide rule over South West Trains. Its bid was indeed impressive – undercutting the BR subsidy by £39m.

Once in the driver's seat it found that in order to make a decent private sector return on a declining level of public subsidy it would have to employ fewer drivers on more flexible terms. This it has succeeded in doing but only at a cost of cancelling services and thereby incurring financial penalties.

In situations like these the first instinct of the Stagecoach chairman, Brian Souter, might be to look for a head and then watch it roll. Unfortunately the obvious candidate has already gone. Peter Field, who used to run South West Trains, was thrown off the footplate last year and replaced by Brian Cox, a long-time Souter lieutenant who makes even his boss look like a pussyfoot. This looks like making an interesting test of Mr Souter's management machinations.

Watch Kohl fight for EMU

If Germany can't meet the Maastricht criteria in time, all bets are off. The chances of Helmut Kohl persuading the German public to plump for the euro on the back of a figure-judge are slim. And European monetary union without Germany is inconceivable.

But the possibility of EMU going ahead at all depends on the timetable. Without the credible excuse of a looming deadline, plenty of European politicians will find it hard to persuade their voters to swallow the horrendous medicine that a successful cur-

rency union demands. All in all then, the growing opinion that Germany can't squeeze its economy into the Maastricht constraint on schedule should cast serious doubt on the prospect that our pockets will jingle with euros in the early years of the next century.

The abysmal German unemployment figures announced last week were only the start of it. This week the markets picked up on rumours that the British media that German officials were revising their deficit forecasts upwards – to 3.5 per cent of GDP rather than the current projection of 2.9 per cent – to cope with extra spending on unemployment benefits.

But hang on a minute. Is this really credible? The German and French governments are as aware as anyone that if the timetable is missed the entire project starts to flake. The German government will do absolutely everything it can to meet the timetable. Watch this space for a supplementary budget later in the year if the public finances deteriorate too far.

Not that a budget nip and tuck here and there will be easy. Fiscal tightening while unemployment is so high could be extremely bad for the economy, and deeply unpopular with the German public, not to mention the opposition-dominated Bundestag, which would have a veto on new legislation. Even so, it is too soon to close the curtains on EMU. Never underestimate what Chancellor Kohl and his colleagues are prepared to do in see the European project through.

Government zeros in on £1bn bill for millennium

Chris Goddard
Business Correspondent

The next government will have to spend at least £1bn, equivalent to half-a-penny on income tax, updating civil service computer systems to cope with the millennium date change problem, a minister warned yesterday.

The surprise estimate emerged as the Treasury group set up by the DTI to raise awareness of the date change crisis admitted that most leading companies had so far failed to get to grips with the problem, despite an alarming rise in the cost of recruiting highly-trained staff.

Most computer systems, along with many of the microchips built into industrial and household appliances, cannot cope with the dates after 2000 because they were only built to recognise the last two digits of each year. Replacing systems already rejecting products with sell-by dates after the millennium because they think they are almost 100 years old.

Ian Taylor, Science and Technology Minister, pledged that the civil service would have solved its millennium problem

by the end of next year, the last date which industry experts believe will give organisations enough time to test new systems. However he predicted central government and the various agencies which pay benefits and levy taxes would need to spend at least £1bn. He also said he doubted the DTI's current estimate of £3m to solve its internal date change difficulties.

In the private sector some consultants are able to command pay of up to £2,000 a day to manage complex millennium computing projects. Jim Tucker, who advises the privatised utilities on the issue, said several firms in the industry had already stopped taking on new work. He explained: "The people shortage is getting critical. Companies most at risk are those who haven't realised it is at such a critical stage. They will find even middle-ranking consultants charging £1,000 a day."

Studies of consultants' salaries in a salary-bidding frenzy have become frequent. The Post Office yesterday confirmed that Dr Nick Fitzgibbon, its director in charge of the millennium project, had recently left to join the consultancy arm of accountants Ernst & Young. Dr Fitzgibbon

was unavailable for comment yesterday, though the Post Office said he had been replaced. Robin Guenier, head of Taskforce 2000, savaged the plans of leading companies at a news conference yesterday, describing their efforts so far as "totally inadequate". One serious concern is that even if companies sort out their own date change problems, they may end up being suppliers who are not well prepared. Hundreds of internal computer programmes may need to be altered in big organisations.

Mr Guenier went on: "It's already too late to expect a total solution. It is no longer possible. But the alternative if we don't do this right is the prospect of serious economic, social and political difficulties in 2000 and beyond."

However, research commissioned by Taskforce 2000 last November showed just 28 per cent of senior managers were fully aware of the problem, only a small rise from the 15 per cent figure in a previous survey in March.

Worse still, just 9 per cent of organisations had completed an audit to assess how much work needed doing.

Anglo-American consortium buys Devonport Royal Naval Dockyard for £40m



An Anglo-American consortium of engineering and services companies has agreed to buy the Devonport Royal Naval Dockyard in Plymouth (above) from the Government for £40.3m in cash. The consortium includes BICC, Wier Group

and Halliburton of the US. The trio already owns the Devonport Management Partnership, which will continue to provide nuclear refuelling and refitting for Trident and other nuclear submarines into the next century, the Ministry of Defence said.

Some 4,500 people work at the dockyard and consultations with trade unions have been completed. The MoD sold the other main naval support base, Rosyth, to Babcock last year. The engineering union, the AEEU, welcomed the sale. Photograph: Apex

IN BRIEF

- Three Arthur Andersen partners were yesterday called in as administrators to Virtuality Group, the first company to bring virtual reality technology to the stock market. Virtuality's shares were suspended at 68.5p last week pending clarification of its financial position. The administrators said they intended to restructure the company and focus on its core business of headsets, which recently won a \$10m (£6m) contract with Philips. David Duggins, one of the administrators, said: "The headsets, which are compatible with personal computers and leading games consoles, have a potentially enormous market, thus generating substantial royalty streams in the future."
- Hopes of a counter-bid emerging for Clyde Petroleum evaporated as predator Gulf Canada raised its stake in the oil exploration and production firm to about 27 per cent. Gulf's buying activity comes after recent steep falls in crude oil prices, which may have driven investors into the arms of the bidder. Market Report, page 18
- Scottish Amicable said yesterday in a letter to policyholders that it had had expressions of interest from more suitors than Abbey National and the Prudential, the two which have gone public on their offers. The mutual insurer said it would seek formal offers from all interested suitors and would take independent financial advice during the selection process. The objective was to maximise financial benefits for with-profits policyholders, "taking into account both short term and long-term returns."
- Allied Irish Banks denied market speculation that it was interested in acquiring the US banking group Riggs National. AIB's results for the year to December exceeded analysts' expectations and the bank said a strong performance in all divisions drove pre-tax profits up by 13 per cent to IR£421m (£412m). But profit-taking and concern about the impact of the planned acquisition of Dauphin Deposit of Pennsylvania for \$1.3bn pulled the shares 2p lower.
- The cable industry will be making profits "as the City understands them" by the year 2000, Stephen Davidson, chairman of the Cable Communications Association, told MPs on the Trade and Industry Select Committee investigating regulation. Mr Davidson, who is also acting chief executive of Telewest Communications, said the industry had invested £6m so far and would invest the same again by the year 2000. He said the industry hoped to have a positive cash flow this year.
- Allied Domecq, the distiller and food retailer, said performance in the first half of the fiscal year would be hurt by the strength of the pound, though profit growth would improve in the second half. The strong pound could cut £20m from full-year earnings.
- LG Securities International today becomes the first Korean member of the London Stock Exchange, when it joins to make a market in Korean stocks on SEAQ International.
- Celtic more than doubled profits in the half year to December. The Scottish Premier League club made £2.1m pre-tax after amortising the value of transfer fees, versus £929,000 in the corresponding period, on sales 46 per cent higher at £12.5m.

Strong sterling casts shadow over Reuters

Magnus Grimond

Reuters, the electronic financial information group, saw profit forecasts sharply downgraded after warning that the pound's strength could severely restrict growth prospects. The shares, which hit a high above 800p in October, slid below 600p at one stage yesterday, before settling 16p down at 620p.

The group calculated that exchange rates ruling at the end of last year would have sliced £220m off sales and around £100m from operating profits had they prevailed throughout 1996. Sterling strengthened by 19 per cent against the German mark and by 9.3 per cent against the dollar last year.

Peter Job, chief executive, said: "If sterling's strength continues, it will severely restrict prospects for reported revenue and earnings growth in 1997." He also warned that moves to offer attractive prices to encourage existing customers to switch

to Reuters' new 3000 range of information terminals would be a drag on revenue growth this year. "This will make it difficult for the group to better the underlying revenue growth rate achieved in 1996," he said.

Lorna Tibbitts, media analyst at Panmure Gordon, said the impact of the strong pound had prompted her to cut her current-year profit forecast from £79m to £67m and £720m and the 1998 prediction from £915m to £780m. But she stressed that the currency problems could easily reverse. Stripping that out, the group was essentially saying it would match last year's underlying sales growth of 8 per cent.

The downgrades came despite the announcement of a 17 per cent rise in pre-tax profits to £701m for the 12 months to December, in line with expectations. The total dividend is being raised a fifth to 11.75p, after a final of 9p, and Mr Job said the strength of the group's un-

derlying business meant Reuters should be able to maintain double-digit dividend growth this year.

However, the group was silent on any further plans to pay back to shareholders some of its surplus cash, which rose another £200m to £1.05bn in the year. Last October, proposals to hand back £513m through the creation of an innovative special dividend were scrapped by the shareholders, Kenneth Clarke, on the eve of their being given approval by shareholders, when he ended certain special tax benefits for institutions.

The group said it would lobby for changes to bring the UK more into line with the greater flexibility on capital changes allowed in the US. But Robert Rowley, finance director, said: "We don't think our shareholders would want us to be in the vanguard of the pack at the moment. We are watching to see what others do."

Investment Column, page 19

Conversion of Woolwich wins 95% backing

Nic Ciciotti
Personal Finance Editor

Members of the Woolwich yesterday overwhelmingly backed the building society's plans to convert in a bank at a special general meeting.

At least 1,000 Woolwich savers and borrowers attended the meeting, called to decide on the society's plans, which will lead to some 2.6 million members receiving free shares worth at least £850 each. The number of votes in favour of conversion amounted to 95 per cent.

Although the ballot had already been decided by the vast number of proxy votes cast in favour of the Woolwich plan, many in the audience applauded speeches against the society's £3bn flotation.

John Stewart, group chief executive at Woolwich, said: "The three options we considered were remaining a building society and possibly merging with another, selling the Woolwich to an existing company, and converting to a public limited company."

Despite his argument, Thomas Lloes, an investing member presently living in Brussels, said that research showed mutuals, whether building societies or insurers, offered better deals for their members than proprietary companies.

"Why can a mutual keep its borrowing rates low and its saving rates high?" Mr Lloes asked.

"It is because it does not have to pay dividends to shareholders. It is in savers and borrowers' long-term interests that we remain a mutual."

He was backed by several speakers who also spoke out against the Woolwich's £50m conversion costs.

Newcastle Building Society yesterday became the latest to close several of its accounts in a bid to stop speculators hoping to benefit from a free shares handout in the event of a takeover or flotation, writes Nic Ciciotti.

The society announced that its Small Savers and Black Callant accounts, which both conferred membership rights, would close immediately, along with its Nova Plus savings scheme.

Instead, the Newcastle will offer deposit accounts, which it said would still offer competitive rates of interest but not entitle members to a share of the society.

Bill Midgley, the society's chief executive, said: "We are being inundated by speculators whose intentions are purely to reap the rewards of a hypothetical conversion or merger."

Amstrad takes £6.4m knock

Magnus Grimond

Amstrad, the computers to mobile telephones group headed by Alan Sugar, yesterday unveiled a further £6.4m exceptional charge for its withdrawal from its disastrous foray into consumer electronics. But analysts were cautiously suggesting the worst may now be over for the group, which has had an unhappy relationship with the City for years, and the shares gained 10p to 174p.

The latest cost comes on top of £10.7m of charges taken at

the end of last year for dealing with the then loss-making audio, video, television and fax operations. At the time, that was said to be the last of the costs associated with the business, but Mr Sugar said it had been difficult to judge what would be realised from the old stock. "We had a job to dispose of £70m of inventory and the £6m is the difference in the margin we thought we were going to earn on that and we didn't earn it."

The latest charges meant Amstrad remained in the red for the six months to December, al-

though losses were cut from £5.4m to £1.78m. At the operating level, the group turned a deficit of £8.79m into a profit of £1.91m. A maintained interim dividend of 1.25p is uncovered by a loss per share of 2.4p. However, the group's net cash climbed from £91.2m to £111.2m over the course of the year, representing 69 per cent of shareholders' funds.

Mr Sugar said he was still considering ways of handing back cash to shareholders. But he warned that any plan would have to be thought out carefully.

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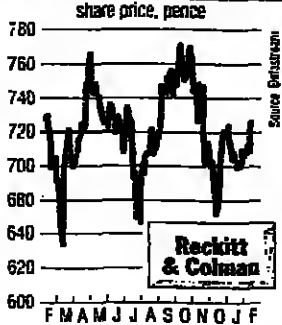
from Legal & General

market report / shares

Data Bank

FTSE 100
4304.3 - 3.4
FTSE 250
4586.0 - 10.1
FTSE 350
2125.8 - 2.3
SEAQ VOLUME
992.9m shares,
49,723 bargains
Gilts Index
96.34 + 0.02

Share spotlight



85 million Clyde shares change hands as Gulf war rages

The fierce battle for control of Clyde Petroleum moved into the stock market as bidders Gulf Canada scooped up around 85 million shares. The buying spree, conducted by Cazenove, lifted the Canadian stake to approaching 28 per cent of Clyde's capital.

The struggle has become increasingly acrimonious; last week the Canadians were forced to lift their offer by 15p a share to 120p, putting a £495m price tag on the company. The battle is due to close next week.

PDFM, with 14 per cent, and CIN Management, holding 3.2 per cent, were among institutions bailing out at prices around 120p.

The rest of the market, in effect, reversed Monday's display. For much of the session blue chips were in gentle decline awaiting New York's lead.

Wall Street produced a solid opening equities started

to shake off their indifference and by the close an 18.8-point fall had been reduced to 3.4 at 4304.3.

Turnover nudged 1 billion shares with the Clyde swoop and busy trading in Asda and Reuters making significant contributions. Little Emerald Energy flared a further 125p to 6.5p ahead of its presentation on its Colombian oil prospects with Seaq putting volume at nearly 45 million.

Superstudies had an eventful session with stories of analyst downgrades swirling around. BZW and ABN Amro Hoare Gervett were said to be preparing to do the damage. Hoare denied any involvement; nobody was available at BZW to comment.

The market could not make up its mind whether an investment house was about to go negative on the sector or direct its attention at one particular group.



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

Tesco was the favourite for individual treatment, falling 11p to 331.5p. Asda was traded 3.75p lower to 112p; Safeway 11p to 346.5p and J Sainsbury 6p to 314.5p.

Oils were weak with British Petroleum's figures offering no encouragement. BP lost 27p to 694p, dragging Shell, results tomorrow, 15.5p down to 1,053.5p. Enterprise Oil tumbled 24p to 648.5p and Lasso 12p to 242p. Other recent high-flyers, such as British Borax Petroleum Syndicate and Cairn Energy felt the strain - Borax lost 41p to 1,315p and Cairn 14p to 539.5p.

Reuters, the information

group, was another unsettled by figures. The shares closed 16p down at 625p. Before the results they were up 18.5p and then dipped briefly below 600p when the profits were announced.

Unilever, the Anglo Dutch giant, was the star of the day, outpacing other blue chips with a 78.5p gain to 1,471.5p following its results and the planned sale of its speciality chemical side.

The food and soap giant's exuberance filtered through to Reckitt & Colman, up 18p to 727.5p, as some observers wondered whether the household products group could fall into Unilever's take over sights.

Associated British Foods, 15p in the money to 496p, and Cadbury Schweppes, 5p to 482p, were among shares to draw strength from the Unilever experience.

BAT Industries, reflecting hopes of some easing of US litigation pressures, put on 21p to 535.5p and Allied Domecq marched 13.5p higher to 428.5p after a mildly encouraging trading statement.

Utilities were under pressure as windfall tax worries suddenly gnawed at confidence. Thames Water was lowered 17.5p to 665p and ScottishPower 10p to 361.5p. Railtrack's express performance prompted the inevitable "take profits" advice. Leather & Greenwood sent out the sell signal, leaving the shares just 3p off at 388.5p.

Electronics dipped 23.5p to 425.5p on Merrill Lynch caution and Eurotherm produced a gloomy trading statement, falling 10p to

473.5p. PolyMase Pharmaceuticals, the drugs group, gave up 6.5p to 125p; the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine sold more shares. The latest disposal is 601,000 shares, cutting its stake to 18.47 per cent. The school needs the cash because of government cuts. It says it has "no intention at present" of selling more shares.

Health shares generally had another string of gains with British Biotech up 10p to 250p, highest since July, and Bio-compatibles International making further headway with a 60p jump to 1,350p. Shield Diagnostic gained 18.5p to 303.5p.

Newcomer Zico, a Canadian miner, made an impressive debut. Placed at 18p, to raise £850,000, the price moved to 25.5p before settling at 24.5p. Wedderburn, a property group, held at 18.75p. It has said it has a significant acquisition in mind.

Shares of Po Na Na, running Spanish-style late-night bars, are having an exciting run on Oxfex. Priced at 9p last year they closed 2p higher at a 51p peak. Stockbroker Teather & Greenwood believes profits this year will emerge at £400,000 with £950,000 in prospect next. The company, related to fully quoted Grosvenor Inns, has eight outlets with two more opening next month.

Action Computer Supplies, one of the few companies recently to come to market via a reverse takeover, is described as "one of the most attractive long-term investments" in the information technology sector by analyst Richard Dyett of Henderson Crosthwaite.

He forecasts profits this year of £4.5m with £6m likely next. The shares held at 190.5p.

Share Price Data

Prices are in sterling except where stated. The yield is last year's dividend, grossed up by 20 per cent, as a percentage of the share price. The price/earnings (P/E) ratio is the share price divided by last year's earnings per share, excluding exceptional items.

Other details: Ex rights = Ex-dividend & Ex all U. Unlisted Securities Market & Suspended - 1p Party Paid per 10 Paid Shares & 100 Stock

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Market leaders: Top 20 volumes

Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol	Stock	Vol
ASDA Group	290,000	BT Ind	120,000	General Elect	94,000	Shell Int	150,000
BP	250,000	Unilever	100,000	Safeway	200,000	Harman	80,000
Reckitt & Colman	200,000	BT	90,000	LSA	150,000	British Biotech	50,000
BT	100,000	Tesco	80,000	Royal & Sun All	60,000	Globe Telecom	50,000

FTSE 100 index hour by hour

Open	4304.3	Down 14.3	11.00	4305.3	Down 2.4	14.00	4295.7	Down 9.0
Close	4304.3	Down 14.3	12.00	4305.3	Down 2.4	15.00	4295.7	Down 12.0
Low	4297.7	Up 2.0	13.00	4300.3	Down 5.0	Close	4304.3	Down 14.3

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Alcoholic Beverages	Stock	Price	Chg	Alcoholic Beverages	Stock	Price	Chg	Alcoholic Beverages	Stock	Price	Chg	Alcoholic Beverages	Stock	Price	Chg	Alcoholic Beverages	Stock	Price	Chg	Alcoholic Beverages	Stock	Price	Chg
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Hall falls from grace at Bath

Out of the Pilkington Cup, struggling in the league – the club that was once the most feared in union has now sacked an icon. Chris Hewett reports

Bloodstains on the carpet, tear stains on the cheek. John Hall's imminent departure from the crumbling fortress of Bath Rugby Club had been the subject of feverish clubhouse speculation since before Christmas. But when push finally came to shove yesterday, the atmosphere at the Recreation Ground was one of genuine shock and grave sorrow.

Shock that Bath, so strong in their bonds of brotherhood and so rooted in the supremacy that brought them 16 league and cup trophies in the 14 years between 1984 and 1996, should have fallen so publicly from grace, that their transition from the uncomplicated world of amateurism to the unforgiving challenge of professionalism should have been so badly mishandled.

And sorrow? Yes, plenty of that. Hall, a world-class wing forward whose career was cruelly undermined by persistent knee trouble, commanded huge respect from even the most critical of Bath supporters. In his own way, he was every bit as much an icon as Jeremy Guscott or Stuart Barnes or Gareth Chilcott.

More impressively still, that respect was shared by his peers. Tony Swift, the former England wing who now sits on the management board at the Rec, once described his old club-mate as "the best player I ever had the good fortune to play alongside." He was far from alone in that view.

Sadly for those who retain romantic notions of what rugby used to be, it is precisely that closeness that is at the root of Bath's predicament: out of the Pilkington Cup, struggling in the Courage League and shorn of the swaggering self-confidence and deep-rooted strength of

character that made them the most feared club side in English rugby history. Suddenly, it is a rough world out there, and old pals' acts cut no ice now that money is at stake.

Hall initially landed the team manager's title in the early summer of 1995, before professional rugby was fully on the English agenda. It was not a hard-headed business decision, but an emotional one: forced by injury to forgo his farewell appearance in the Pilkington Cup final against Wasps, he was swept into the job on a wave of player power – always

Suddenly, it is a rough world out there, and old pals' acts cut no ice now money is at stake

an important element in the Bath fabric – within days of the Twickenham showpiece. His appointment effectively marginalised two of his most familiar playing colleagues and fellow England internationals, Chilcott and Richard Hill, who had both taken on high-profile back-room roles at the Rec. Chilcott distanced himself from the club almost immediately and, within a few weeks of the start of the 1995/96 campaign, Hill joined Gloucester as coaching director.

Still, all seemed well when Bath tied up yet another league and cup double last May. Hall worked like a Trojan throughout the summer to fend off big-spending rivals and hold his

squad together until the club negotiated their own sugar-daddy deal with a local multi-millionaire greetings card tycoon, Andrew Brownword. Ben Clarke, enticed by a lucrative bid from Richmond, was the only first-team regular to leave and that seemed to pale into insignificance when Henry Paul and Jason Robinson, two brilliant rugby league talents, crossed the great divide to play alongside the likes of Guscott and De Glanville.

Neither signing proved especially successful, however, and discontent at Paul's reputed £5,000-a-game deal gathered pace. When Bath were dumped out of the Heineken Cup by Cardiff at the quarter-final stage, rumours of a rift between Hall and Brian Ashton, the chief coach, began to circulate. By Christmas, Ashton had taken extended leave from his post. By early January, he was gone.

That prompted a reshuffle at the top. Brownword, hardly a rugby man by instinct but keen to protect his initial £2.5m investment, decided to involve himself in the day-to-day running of the club and Swift took over as chief executive with a powerful and wide-ranging brief. Hall, his position weakened by damaging newspaper publicity following alleged incidents in a city wine bar after a victory over Harlequins in December, looked vulnerable.

The last straw came on Saturday, when Leicester inflicted the most comprehensive defeat on Bath in a decade. Hall, clearly shaken afterwards but still prepared to answer the hard questions, fell back on self-deprecating humour. "It's not the end of the world," he said. "It just feels like it."

The irony is almost too bitter to contemplate.



Recreation breakdown: The departure of John Hall as Bath's director of rugby yesterday is another blow to the club's confidence. Photograph: Allsport

Rowell loses Greening to overwork

CHRIS HEWETT

Jack Rowell, the England coach, has spent most of the season voicing concern over the relentless programme of top-level matches confronting international players and those fears came home to roost yesterday when Phil Greening, his reserve hooker, withdrew from the party to face Ireland in this weekend's round of Five Nations matches. The Gloucester live-wire aggravated already damaged knee ligaments during his club's Courage league victory over Orrell at the weekend.

Richard Cockerill, of Leicester, was immediately promoted from the England A front row and will take Greening's place on the bench at Lansdowne Road, with Graham Rowntree a fixture on the loose head and Darren Garforth, a specialist tight head, on the bench, the elevation of the most talkative Tiger of them all means a national triumph for Welford Road's ever-popular ABC club.

Greening's misfortune was not of concern to Rowell alone. Fran Cotton and the rest of the Lions selection panel have been monitoring his progress for some weeks with a view to taking him to South Africa this summer and with Keith Wood, their obvious first choice from Ireland, on the long-term injury list with shoulder trouble, they could have done without the news.

The Springboks themselves reacted to a serious domestic problem yesterday when Rian Oberholzer, chief executive of the South African Rugby Football Union, announced moves to prevent a further migration of talent to big-spending clubs in Europe. "International Rugby Board regulation number nine says that any player wanting to play outside his country has first to be released by his union," Oberholzer said. "We will not be doing that from now on."

If Oberholzer's threat is genuine, the South Africans will actively bar any more leading lights cashing in on the professional free-for-all that has defined the English game since the summer. Three members of the Springboks' 1995 World Cup-winning squad – Francois Pienaar, Joel Stransky and Rudi Strauß – are already playing their trade in the Courage league, along with fellow Test players Steve Atherton and John Allan. Oberholzer believes enough is enough. "We have a responsibility to keep provincial and club rugby in South Africa strong," he said, adding that he did not anticipate any challenges to the decision in the courts.

Neil Jenkins, the Wales back, is to break new ground in his race to be fit for Saturday's meeting with France. The record Wales points-scorer has never worn a gunshield, but the protective device could guarantee he plays in Paris. Jenkins cracked his chest bone during Pontypridd's Wales League victory over Caerphilly last weekend, the damaged area being just above his mouth. "Neil badly wants to play, and I want him to play," Kevin Bowring, the Wales coach, said after Jenkins had been measured for a gunshield. "But I don't want him to do any more damage and put himself out for four, six or eight weeks."

Bowring must also make decisions on the centre Allan Bateman, the flanker Steve Williams and the replacement utility forward Craig Quinell, though he had good news from the wing Iwan Evans, who has recovered from a virus.

Bateman, who underwent knee surgery a fortnight ago, is confident he can resume his midfield partnership with Scott Gibbs. Neath's Williams had an X-ray on a thumb injury following tripping, while Quinell could need a scan after straining his knee.

GRAND NATIONAL First

LINGFIELD

200

230

240

250

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270

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290

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320

INDEPENDENT FANTASY FOOTBALL

LATEST RESULTS AND TOP 50 TEAMS

TOP FIFTY LEAGUE TABLE

CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 17 AUGUST - 2 FEBRUARY

POS	NAME	TEAM	POINTS
1	MR PETER FRANKENTAL	JOSI MARTI	717
2	MR PETER FRANKENTAL	ARLANSU	692
3	MR ASHLEY BRETTE	RELEGATION 12	692
4	MR GARY HARRIS	IN STARS	682
5	MR GARFIELD MCCULLEN	GARFIELD BOYS SECOND	691
6	MR WILLIAM BARR	WARRIOR BC	690
7	MR SIMON LIU	DEFENCE ROVERS	687
8	MR GRAHAM LONGSDANE	SANDLING STROLLERS	685
9	MR S KING	CRUISING ALEXANDRA	683
10	MR SIMON DRAPER	PLATE FC	678
11	MR RICK YAP	OUT OF MIND	678
12	MR ROBERT GREENFIELD	THE GRASS	677
13	MR NICK KNIGHT	KNIGHT'S NANA HEAD	677
14	MR JOHN COX	SOUTHERN FC	677
15	MR GOWDWIN	NOVODOD	677
16	MR BILL COOPER	YEP MOP 2998	671
17	DR STEPHEN MATTHEWS	I IMPERIAL BATES	669
18	DR HOME	THE POKING COGS	668
19	MR PAUL MATTHEW	THE DOOR MAT	668
20	DR TOM BOYLE	LAST GASP CLUB	667
21	MR MICHAEL GREGGSON	LITTLE UNIS	667
22	MR DANIEL NICHOLAS	EVING	666
23	MR ADAM HOGG	SLACK HOGG	666
24	MR A MORGAN	SLACK START	665
25	MR R RENNICK	WILD ROVERS	664
26	MR SEAN BROSSEMAN	QAGS	664
27	MR JONATHAN FURNESS	REDSTAR CARDIFF	662
28	MR KEITH HOBBS	ORGANIC MANURE FC	661
29	MR PAUL RICHARDSON	CINCINNATI STORY	661
30	MR DAVID ASHTON	THE LOOPERS	660
31	MR R PRINGLE	DEEPDALE VILLA 7	660
32	MR LAN GROUT	SLICK CITY	660
33	MR JOE GOODING	TEAM SQUIDLIPS	660
34	MR J HETHERINGTON	BEYING	659
35	MR J JOLLY	JBBO'S	659
36	MR ANDY SWANNLEY	DOGS BITE	658
37	MR JONATHAN MCCORMEN	WASH TOP ARMY	658
38	MR ANTHONY CROW	PELLICAN CITY	658
39	MR K B HALCOLM	INTER HALCOLM	658
40	MR PAUL HEMMINGWAY	WAGON WHEELS	657
41	MR M CROSLAND	OSNEY C LYONS	657
42	MR PAUL CLIFTON	NO TROUBLE	657
43	MR D R KENNEDY	HAMMERS UNITED	657
44	MR G MURPHY	CLEAN SHEETS	656
45	MR C M DOWN	DEALS RESERVES	656
46	MR BARRY LEE	LEE HANOVER	656
47	MR PETER SHERLOCK	LINCOLN ST GILES	655
48	MR DUNCAN FULLER	SEALANZ	655
49	MR STEVEN HART	KIE'S COWBOYS	655
50	MR RAYMOND CHICKEN	ALIVE MEN FROM LINCOLN	655

THE INDEPENDENT INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

PHILIPS Let's make things better

Today we publish the latest results in our Independent Fantasy Football game, supported by Philips Energy Saver Light Bulbs.

The Team Market and Scores table published below, shows four scores. The Week 26 (Wk 26) column lists all points scored in matches played between Monday 3 February - Sunday 9 February inclusive. Column B lists all points scored before the transfer period. Column A lists all points scored after the transfer period. The Overall (Ov) column lists the total amount of points scored in all matches played from Saturday 17 August - Sunday 9 February.

Also published today is the Top 50 League table (see left). It lists the overall top scoring Independent Fantasy Football managers and their teams for matches played between Saturday 17 August - Sunday 2 February.

Results will be published every Wednesday in The Independent for all games played from the previous Monday to Sunday inclusive. They will also

appear the following Sunday, in the Independent on Sunday. The overall Top 50 League table will be printed every Wednesday and again on Sunday. Terms and conditions as previously published

PRIZES

The overall winner at the end of the season will be the entrant who has accrued more points than any other Independent Fantasy Football team in that time. Win the ultimate prize - a trip to the 1998 World Cup in France. The winner, plus companion, will see all the action of a quarter-final and a semi-final of their choice, plus the final. In addition, the highest scoring team each month will win a pair of tickets to one of England's World Cup qualifying games at Wembley.

TEAM MARKET AND SCORES

OVERALL SCORE CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 17 AUGUST - 9 FEBRUARY; WEEK 26 SCORE CALCULATED ON MATCHES PLAYED FROM 2 FEBRUARY - 9 FEBRUARY

CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	W26	PTS	A	Ov	VAL	CODE	PLAYER	TEAM	W26	PTS	A	Ov	VAL
GOALKEEPERS															
300	Seamus	ARS	0	38	9	47	5.8	476	Wright	LIV	0	22	34	56	2.8
301	Bonnie	AV	0	5	29	34	3.9	477	Madock	TUT	0	12	18	30	1.8
302	Flowers	BLA	0	19	36	55	7.5	478	Skals	TUT	0	6	13	19	1.2
303	Narine	CHE	0	21	0	21	3.7	479	Hartman	ARS	0	6	0	6	1.2
304	Harlow	DER	0	1	1	2	0.3	480	Neville (C)	MU	0	8	13	21	3.1
305	Flanck	COV	0	12	30	42	5.2	481	Neville (D)	MU	0	8	13	21	3.1
306	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	482	Irwin	MU	0	36	39	75	9.5
307	Flanck	COV	0	12	30	42	5.2	483	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
308	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	484	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
309	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	485	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
310	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	486	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
311	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	487	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
312	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	488	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
313	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	489	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
314	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	490	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
315	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	491	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
316	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	492	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
317	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	493	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
318	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	494	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
319	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	495	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
320	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	496	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
321	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	497	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
322	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	498	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
323	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	499	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
324	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	500	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
325	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	501	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
326	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	502	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
327	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	503	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
328	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	504	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
329	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	505	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
330	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	506	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
331	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	507	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
332	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	508	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
333	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	509	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
334	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	510	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
335	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	511	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
336	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	512	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
337	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	513	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
338	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	514	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
339	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	515	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
340	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	516	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
341	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	517	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
342	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	518	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
343	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	519	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
344	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	520	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
345	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	521	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
346	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	522	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
347	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	523	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
348	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	524	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
349	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	525	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
350	Shanahan	COV	0	0	0	0	0.0	526	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
DEFENDERS															
400	Wright	LIV	0	22	34	56	2.8	527	Wright	LIV	0	22	34	56	2.8
401	Madock	TUT	0	12	18	30	1.8	528	Madock	TUT	0	12	18	30	1.8
402	Skals	TUT	0	6	13	19	1.2	529	Skals	TUT	0	6	13	19	1.2
403	Hartman	ARS	0	6	0	6	1.2	530	Hartman	ARS	0	6	0	6	1.2
404	Neville (C)	MU	0	8	13	21	3.1	531	Neville (C)	MU	0	8	13	21	3.1
405	Neville (D)	MU	0	8	13	21	3.1	532	Neville (D)	MU	0	8	13	21	3.1
406	Irwin	MU	0	36	39	75	9.5	533	Irwin	MU	0	36	39	75	9.5
407	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	534	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
408	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	535	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
409	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	536	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
410	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	537	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
411	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	538	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
412	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	539	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
413	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	540	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
414	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	541	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
415	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	542	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
416	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	543	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
417	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	544	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
418	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	545	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
419	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	546	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
420	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	547	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
421	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	548	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
422	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	549	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
423	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	550	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
424	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	551	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
425	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	552	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
426	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	553	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
427	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	554	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
428	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	555	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
429	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	556	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
430	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	557	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
431	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	558	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
432	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	559	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
433	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	560	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
434	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	561	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
435	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	562	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
436	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	563	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
437	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	564	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
438	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	565	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
439	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	566	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
440	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	567	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
441	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	568	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
442	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	569	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
443	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	570	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
444	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	571	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
445	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	572	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
446	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	573	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
447	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	574	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
448	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	575	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
449	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	576	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
450	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	577	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
451	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	578	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
452	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	579	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
453	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	580	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
454	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	581	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
455	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0	582	May	MU	0	31	39	70	9.0
456	May	MU	0												



Howe and why...

Where tonight's match will be won and lost, page 22

sport

New recruit

Riddick Bowe joins the Marines, page 23

WORLD CUP: Hoddle refuses to reveal results of fitness tests on Adams and Ince as he prepares for crucial qualifying match

Zola threatens the English renaissance

GLENN MOORE
Football Correspondent

The extent of English football's renaissance will be tested tonight by an Italian side seeking to embark upon a rebirth of their own.

On a wet and windy Wembley night, far removed from the summer of lions, England will seek to revive the memory of Euro'96 and Italy to exercise it. There is a sense that Italy, one of the few nations whose football pedigree surpasses England's, are vulnerable. Disparaged in the group stages in the summer, under new management, weak in core positions, they come to Wembley in a state of flux.

However, they also arrive bolstered by the knowledge that Juventus have twice outplayed Manchester United this season, that Gianfranco Zola is running riot in the Premiership, and that England are riven by injuries (although some of Machiavelli's descendants suspect a "smokescreen").

It could also be argued that their Euro'96 departure was at worst, unfortunate. Arrigo Sacchi's foolish team selections were compounded by a referee's cowardice in not dismissing Andreas Köpke in the crucial group game. Like England, Italy drew with Germany.

Sacchi has since gone and his replacement, Cesare Maldini, has had only a one-sided match with Northern Ireland with which to prepare. He is no novice, though. Watching a video of one of the great Italian performances, the 3-2 win over Brazil in the 1982 World Cup, one sees a man in a white jacket leap from the Italian bench to embrace Paolo Rossi at the final whistle. That man was Maldini, a part of the Italian national coaching set-up since before Glenn Hoddle even played international football.

Maldini arrives at Wembley, where he captained Milan to a European Cup win over Benfica



The calm before the storm: Italy's Gianfranco Zola at Wembley yesterday, preparing for tonight's World Cup qualifier against England

Photograph: David Ashdown

ENGLAND									
GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY
DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY
MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY
FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY

ITALY									
GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY	GOALKEEPERS	ASHLEY
DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY	DEFENDERS	ASHLEY
MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY	MIDFIELDERS	ASHLEY
FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY	FORWARDS	ASHLEY

World Cup Group Two									
England	W	D	L	P	F	A	G	P	P
Italy	W	D	L	P	F	A	G	P	P
Poland	W	D	L	P	F	A	G	P	P
Georgia	W	D	L	P	F	A	G	P	P
Malta	W	D	L	P	F	A	G	P	P

34 years ago, with a strong hand, Fabrizio Ravanelli, Enrico Chiesa and Alessandro Del Piero make a £30m front three which would match most in the world. Yet all could be on the bench. Luca Viali and Beppe Signori are not even in the squad.

Yet Italy, as Don Howe explains inside, are vulnerable in the key positions of goalkeeper and sweeper. England, depending on who is fit when the smoke finally clears, also have rare riches. Les Ferdinand, Robbie Fowler, Ian Wright and

Steve McManaman could be on the bench. One hopes McManaman plays, ideally in a refurbished Christmas tree formation. That would have him and Paul Mereson roaming behind Alan Shearer, who is fit after his back injury responded to spells in traction. David Beckham and Graeme Le Saux, two ball-playing athletes and excellent crossers, will patrol the flanks. Between them David Batty and Paul Ince would anchor the midfield.

However, Ince looks even less likely to overcome his thigh injury than Tony Adams, the other major doubt, his ankle problem. If both have failed yesterday afternoon's fitness tests – Hoddle was not revealing the results – it will prove he was not laying a false trail, not that vindication will give him any satisfaction. "They are no more than 50-50," Hoddle said.

If Ince is absent, Jamie Redknapp may be a better replacement than Paul Gascoigne. He is fitter, more disciplined and rarely wastes a pass. Gascoigne could still have a part to play. Introduced after

an hour, when the game has slowed to his pace, he could be devastating. The back three are likely to be Sol Campbell, Gareth Southgate and Stuart Pearce, one of whom may track Zola. While this is a departure from standard practice, the alternative is to have three men marking Zola's partner while the little Sardinian floats behind him.

David Seaman is fit to keep goal and his experience could be crucial. "There is not much between the sides," Hoddle said. "Each have individuals who can

unlock doors. It will be tight and it might come down to a lack of concentration in defence." Hoddle added that European football has "respect for English players now." Up to a point. Italian press compliments have been back-handed. "Fistfights, beer, drugs and jail: yes, we're English" ran one headline in the Turin daily *La Stampa* as it listed the squad's past misdemeanours. Hoddle was praised for turning "a bunch of drunkards, pub brawlers, and drug addicts into one of the best national sides England has ever seen."

McManaman's efforts to change people's perception of him, which he spoke about in *The Independent* on Monday, appear to have been startlingly successful. *La Repubblica* described the contrast between him and Gascoigne thus: "On the one hand Gazza, who represents the England of beer, the inner cities, pubs, darts and its on page three of *The Sun*, the sort of washed-up character you'd find in a Ken Loach film on the other Macca, who is all afternoon tea, cashmere, the City and stiff upper lip: he could be played by

Hugh Grant in a Merchant Ivory production." Hopefully they will thus be celebrating with, respectively, a bottle of Newky Brown, and a cup of Earl Grey tonight. Hoddle stressed that "a draw would not be a disaster" but it would leave England struggling to earn automatic qualification for France '98.

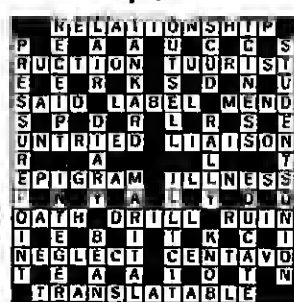
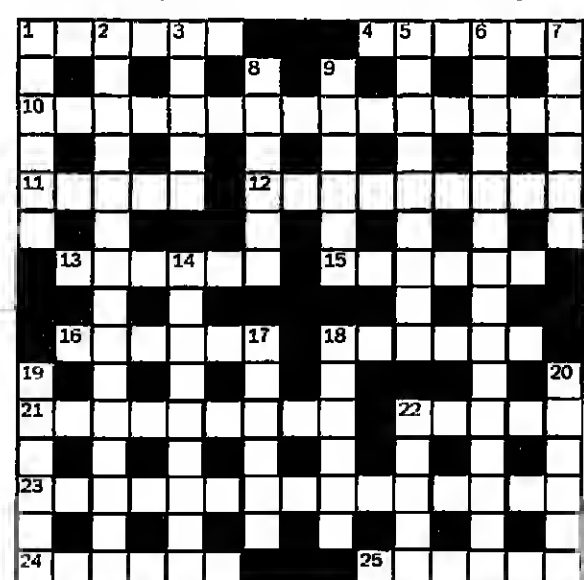
England have not beaten Italy in four games and 20 years. It will be difficult and tense but they now have the quality and confidence to do so. Don Howe's analysis, page 22

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

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By Mass

Tuesday's Solution



- ACROSS**
- All the performers – or the star? (6)
 - Plugs and ball, accumulate surface film of liquid (6)
 - Repeats too much? Mistakenly, CA posts even more (15)
 - Wood, deal, cut by first of snows (5)
 - Booker arrest one, about monstrosity happy (9)
 - Drive and acumen, we hear (6)
 - Reduce the rent for the sake of economy (6)
 - Fancies drink outside bar on way back (6)
 - Indian audibly losing head in scrums (6)
 - Bird (on blighted tree, dead) emitted short notes (9)
 - He cuts thousand given to debtor (5)
 - Conservative reversals of policy? (5,5-5)
- DOWN**
- Express going round right bend (6)
 - Take this now – you'll get the rest later (8,7)
 - At the correct moment before Unionist enters (2,3)
 - Leave snare mostly hidden for the creature (6,3)
 - Atlas is not available here (2,3,2,5)
 - Driver, traveller in rough country, ignoring the heart of it (6)
 - Spike the demon drink (6)
 - Concerned with drink and crack (6)
 - Attire is knitted without right needles (9)
 - Cleans shelves (6)

- River still rising round one platform (6)
- A Queen cradling one mile? (6)
- Oscillations club (6)
- Consort's with Queen Mother (5)

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Maldini's mischief with the media

"Somewhere in here, I promise you, is the Italian coach Cesare Maldini," the TV reporter said yesterday, gesturing to a media scrum on the Wembley tarmac which resembled an Agoraphobics Convention. As he spoke, the white pickup truck on which he stood reeled into life. "Oh, our intrepid reporter shouted to his cameraman. 'He's driving away!'"

In the meantime, the man who will guide his country's fortunes in tonight's World Cup qualifier was busy saying as little as possible.

No, he was not waiting to see what line-up Glenn Hoddle picked before announcing his own and if his plans involved

bringing in the Real Madrid defender, Christian Panucci, as a sweeper in order to deal with Alan Shearer, he was not letting on. No, he did not think Wembley would hold any psychological sway over his men. "These guys play all over the world," he said. "This is no different to other big games."

For all Maldini's down-playing, however, the game does indeed feel big and that sensation is not wholly the product of the febrile coverage it has stimulated in recent days.

Perhaps it is something about the inherent glamour of any Italian team. Even reciting the names of players only previously glimpsed on Channel 4 creates

Mike Rowbottom joins the Italian squad at Wembley

a sense of esoteric relish. Di Livio, Di Matteo, Casiraghi... They were all out on the Wembley turf yesterday, wearing blue bobbie hats and gloves against the insidious dampness of a grey February day but their session offered little clue as to their tactics for tonight. Unless, of course, they plan to spend time hopping, stretching and chattering in an attempt to lure England off their guard.

The players were helped to feel at home by energetic chanting – "It-al-ia, It-al-ia" – from a

group of around 30 supporters carrying Italian flags. "We are all Italian and proud of it," Enzo Dato, of Archway, said. Neither she nor her companions – from Highgate, Golders Green, The Angel, Islington, and, in the case of Matteo, Quaglini, Perugia – had tickets. But there were high hopes expressed that Dato's uncle, chauffeur for the Italian squad, might be able to do something about that.

Much has been made of the potential advantage to Italians playing in the Premiership when it came to knowing about their English opponents. "Playing here is a very big help," Chelsea's Gianfranco Zola said. His club-mate, Roberto Di Matteo, preferred a different opinion. "I

don't think playing here helps," he said. "It doesn't really matter." Good to get that cleared up definitively.

Di Matteo did, however, venture the opinion that tonight's game would be very tight. "Each team will treat the other with a lot of respect. If we lose it will be difficult for us. But we always have the return game in Italy."

As the Italian coach manoeuvred out of the narrow players' entrance, the media dispersed to evaluate the information it had gathered.

One onlooker was more than satisfied. The supporter from Perugia had managed a word with his city's more famous son, Fabrizio Ravanelli. And the Silver Fox had given him his blue bat.

Hall pays the price for failure at Bath

Rugby Union
CHRIS HEWITT

The bleak realities of professional rugby left their mark on one of the outstanding figures in the English game yesterday when John Hall, world-class flanker and champion team manager, lost his £60,000-a-year post at Bath. No one at the Recreation Ground would confirm whether he had jumped or been pushed, but there was no doubt that Hall had paid the price of failure.

Less than 72 hours after Bath's Pilkington Cup demise at the hands of Leicester, their

director of rugby became the first big name on rugby's managerial scrapheap. He will not be the last. After a century or more of amateurism, financial freedom has thrust the sport into a whole new ball game, the rules of which are very different to those in force less than a year ago.

Tony Swift, the Bath chief executive and a long-time playing colleague and close friend of Hall's, last night refused to discuss the precise nature of yesterday's boardroom deliberations. But he admitted: "This has probably been the worst day of my working life. An essential part of any job is the enjoyment

you derive from it. I can safely say that I haven't enjoyed this episode one little bit."

However, he continued: "It is imperative that decisions are taken in the best long-term interests of the club. I have enormous respect for the things John achieved at Bath, but now is the time to make the most of the future lying before us."

It is the second time in less than two months that Bath, league and cup winners last season but struggling this time round, have lost a key backroom figure. Last month, Brian Ashton quit as chief coach, citing frustration with the management set-up. Reports of a

personality clash with Hall were never convincingly repudiated.

Swift said that new coaching appointments would soon be announced. The new coaching set-up, under the command of Andy Robinson, will include Nigel Redman, the long-serving former England lock forward.

More intriguing, though, will be the arrival of Clive Woodward, one of the most imaginative tactical brains in the British game. The former Leicester and Lions centre quit his post with London Irish before Christmas and has been seen regularly at Bath since Ashton's departure.

Yesterday, he confirmed that

he had agreed terms with Bath, emphasising that he would be no more than a member of the coaching team. If, however, Bath decided to appoint a new director of rugby, Woodward would be an obvious candidate.

Phil de Glanville, the Bath and England captain, confessed to a feeling of "deep surprise" at Hall's downfall as he arrived for an international squad session at Marlow yesterday. Jon Sleighthorne, his club-mate on the England right wing, agreed. "I'm shocked. There was no indication of this when the players met yesterday morning," he said.

Hall's fall, page 20



Tr

Labour's warning of crime wave

Blair she

Donovan Wolmar

Donovan Wolmar

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